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Jul/Aug 2015

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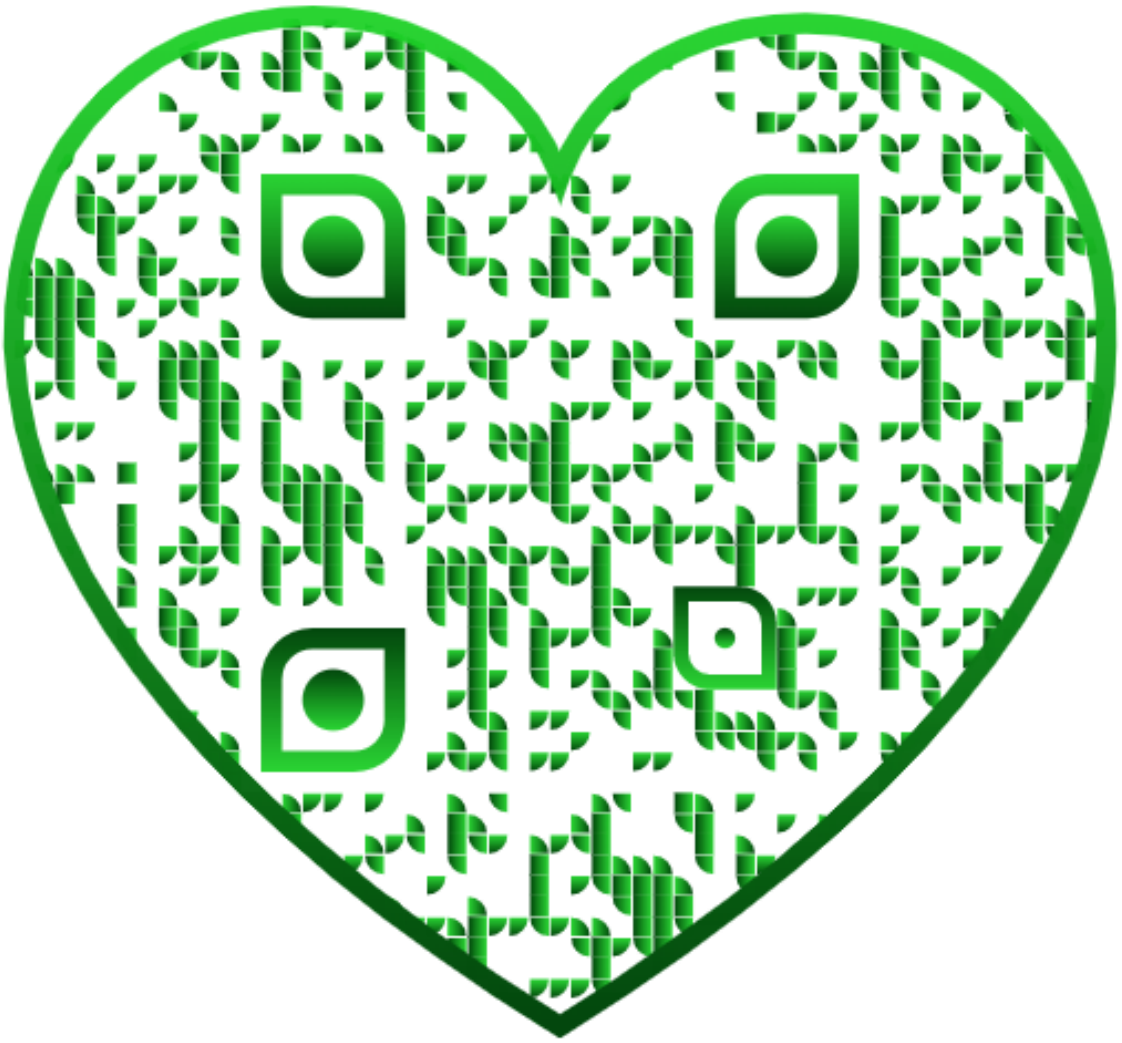

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GROUP ONE: MELODIC HARD ROCK AND AOR

1. **Ten** - Tell Me What To Do
From the album: Isla De Muerta
www.facebook.com/TenOfficial

2. **Shaft Of Steel** - Drive
From the album: Art Of Steel
www.facebook.com/shaftofsteel

3. **Chalice** - You Better Get Used To It
From the album: Overyears Sensation
www.chalice.de

4. **Nelson** - You and Me
From the album: Peace Out
www.matthewandgunnarnelson.com/

5. **Lotta Lené** - Seven Days
From the album: Smoke And Mirrors
www.lottalene.com

6. **Estrella** - Here I Am
From the album: We Will Go On
www.esterellarock.com

7. **Sexplosion** - Just Fight
From the album: Swallow n' Shut Up?
www.facebook.com/Sexplosionband

8. **Whiskey Hell** - Weed 'n' Whiskey
From the album: Bullets 'n' Burritos
www.whiskeyhell.com/Whiskey_Hell/welcome.html

9. **Tumble Weed** - Nothing You In Rock N' Roll
From the album: It's Hard It's Life
www.tumbleweedofficial.com

10. **Sacred Wind** - Dragon Ships and Women's Hips
From the album: Dragon Ships and Women's Hips
www.sacredwind.co.uk

11. **High Road Easy** - Between The Devil And The Deep Blue Sea
From the album: III
www.highroadeasy.com

12. **Moxy** - Midnight Flight
From the album: 40 Years and Still Riding High
www.escape-music.net

13. **Osukaru** - Edge of A Broken Heart
From the album: Transistion
www.osukarumusic.com

14. **Purpura Ink** - Flying Away
From the album: Breakin' Chains
http://on.fb.me/1A9q2mZ

15. **Mark Slaughter** - Velcro Jesus
From the album: Reflections In A Rear View Mirror
www.escape-music.net

16. **Baltimoore** - My Number One
From the album: 1.1
www.baltimoore.net

17. **Iconic Eye** - Let It Rain Down
From the album: Hidden In Plain Sight
www.facebook.com/iconic.eye.music

18. **Radioactive** - The Piper
From the album: FOUR
www.escape-music.net

19. **Daylight Robbery** - I'll Be Seeing You
From the album: Falling Back To Earth
www.daylightrobberyrocks.co.uk

20. **Klogr** - Breaking Down
From the album: Make Your Stand
www.klogr.net

21. **Phoenix Calling** - Everybody Knows
From the album: Forget Your Ghosts
www.facebook.com/phoenixcalling

22. **Dancing Flame** - Warrior's Path
From the album: Carnival Of Flames
www.dancingflameband.com

23. **Dennis Churchill Dries** - Heard It On The Radio
From the album: I
www.aorheaven.com

24. **Venrez** - Hang The Predator
From the album: Children Of The Drones
www.venreztheband.com

25. **Torrential Thrill** - Lightning
From the album: Mars
www.torrentialthrill.com/

26. **Four Star Revival** - Red
From the album: Knights Of The Revival
www.facebook.com/pages/Four-Star-Revival/308267629272924

27. **StrongHeart** - Friday Night
From the album: Scream Out Loud
www.strongheart.se

28. **Aces And Kings** - Where's The Action

29. **Aces And Kings** - Don't Stop
Both from the album: Don't Stop
www.acesandkings.co.uk

30. **Sandness** - Artificial Lover
From the album: Like An Addiction
www.sandnessofficial.com

31. **Ben Cote Band** - Horseshoes and Hand-Grenades
From the album: 'Wax & Plastic'
www.bencoteband.com

32. **DBC & Friends** - Whiskey Land
From the album: Whiskey Land
www.facebook.com/dbcandfriends

33. **Black 4** - Combat
From the album: The Tales of Cuatro Negro
www.black4band.com

34. **Fuel To Fire** - Permission To Die
From the album: Nothing Left To Burn
http://fueltofire.de

GROUP TWO: 70s RETRO ROCK & BLUES & SOUTHERN ROCK & AMERICANA/FOLK

35. **Timothy Craig** - The Closer I Get
From the album: 360°
www.timothycraig.com

36. **The Banquet Years** - Timbuktu
From the album: Vortex
www.facebook.com/TheBanquetYears

37. **Dr. Tid & The Triple Eights** - Louisana
From the album: Nothing To Say
www.facebook.com/pages/Dr-Tid-The-Triple-Eights/55418923694

38. **Samuel Baron** - Monkey Rock
From the album: St. Parrott
www.samuelbaron.net

39. **Sunsets The Day** - Edge of the World
From the album: Sunsets The Day
www.facebook.com/sunsetstheday

40. **Jessica's Theme Band** - Black Cat
From the album: Matter Of Time
www.jessicasthemeband.com

41. **Killer Boogie** - The Golden Age
From the album: Detroit
www.facebook.com/killerboogie

42. **Justin Teal Morgan** - Move Me
From the album: 60 Miles To Memphis
www.reverbnation.com/justintealmorgan

43. **Doomsday Outlaw** - New Salvation
From the album: Black River
www.doomsdayoutlaw.com

44. **Black Rainbows** - Wolf Eyes
From the album: Hawkdope
www.theblackrainbows.com

GROUP THREE: PROGRESSIVE ROCK

45. **Telesma** - Skin of our Teeth
From the album: Decade Dance
www.telesmaband.com

46. **Toomas Vanem** - Flower Power
From the album: I
www.toomasvanem.com

47. **Forest Field** - Stronger
From the album: Onwards and Upwards
www.rockcompany.nl

48. **Blurry Lights** - Always on My Mind
From the album: Blurry Lights
http://blurrylights.com

49. **Garden** - Leaving Home
From the album: Somewhere Else
garden.bandcamp.com

50. **Vinyl Floor** - ColorBlind
From the album: Vaudeville
www.vinylfloor.dk

51. **Empty Yard Experiment** - God Has His Reasons
From the album: Kallisti
www.emptyyardexperiment.com

GROUP FOUR: SYMPHONIC ROCK/POWER METAL AND HEAVY METAL

52. **Helloween** - My God-Given Right
From the album: My God-Given Right
www.nuclearblast.de

53. **Karnataka** - Because Of You
From the album: Secrets Of Angels
http://karnataka.org.uk

54. **Zoliborz** - Roland Garros 2048
From the album: Poincare Conjecture
https://zoliborz.bandcamp.com

55. **Heavens Gate** - Livin' In Hysteria
From the album: Best For Sale
www.forever-rock.de

56. **Powerwolf** - Armata Strigoi
From the album: Blessed & Possessed
www.nuclearblast.de

57. **Sun Shadows** - Sunshine
From the album: Red Herring
http://sunshadows.fr

58. **Civil War** - Bay of Pigs
From the album: Gods And Generals
www.napalmrecords.com

59. **Last Avenue** - Spying From The Future (feat. Devy Diadema)
From the album: Integration Protocol
www.lastavenue.fr

60. **Valkeryon** - Never Fades
From the album: Vision Of Fire
www.valkeryon.com

61. **M.O.B** - Legions of the Antichrist
From the album: Out Of The Dark
http://mobrockz.com

62. **Casvadell** - Baptism by Fire
From the album: Bull By The Horns
https://casvadell.bandcamp.com/track/baptism-by-fire

63. **Harmorage** - Scarifies
From the album: Psychico Corrosif
www.harmorage.com

64. **Vantage Point** - Demonic Dinner Dance
From the album: Demonic Dinner Dance
www.facebook.com/vantagepointrocks

65. **Unleash the Archers** - Tonight We Ride
From the album: Time Stand Still
www.napalmrecords.com

66. **Pavillon Rouge** - Droge Macht Frei
From the album: Pavillon Rouge
www.facebook.com/LuxDiscipline/

GROUP FIVE: MODERN/ALTERNATIVE ROCK

67. **Sassy Kraimspri** - Say What
From the album: Cock Fight II
www.sassykraimspri.com

68. **The Karma Party** - World War
From the album: Illumination
www.thekarmaparty.co.uk

69. **Push** - Do What You Want
From the album: Friction
www.Pushkicksass.com

70. **Me And My Shadow** - Indigo
From the album: Mechanism
www.meandmyshadow.rocks

71. **David Arthur** - Illusions
From the album: Making Legends
www.davidarthurmakinglegends.com

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FIREWORKS

Headquarters:
Fireworks Magazine
10 Dunnock Close, Offerton
Stockport, SK2 5XD, UK
fireworks.mag@ntlworld.com
www.rocktopia.co.uk

Editor:
Bruce Mee

Reviews Editor:
Dave Scott

Assistant Editors:
Steven Reid, Anthony Heeks
& Rob McKenzie

Art Editor:
James Gaden
www.solitaryvision.co.uk

Staff Writers:
Phil Ashcroft
Sue Ashcroft
Dave Bott
Carl Buxton
Monica Castedo-Lopez
Dave Cockett
Alan Holloway
Duncan Jamieson
Ian Johnson
Gary Marshall
Mike Newdeck
Ray Paul

Contributors this issue:
Mike Ainscoe
Michael Anthony
Bruce E. J. Atkinson
Andy Brailsford
Julia Braun
Sophie Brownlee
Mick Burgess
Az Chaudhry
Dave Crompton
Kieran Dargan
Mark Donnelly
Lara Kisel
Alexandra Mrozowska
Helen Bradley-Owers
Ian Parry
Brent Rusche
Steve Swift
Woody

Cover CD compiler:
Nicky Baldrian
twosidemoon.promo@ntlworld.com

Rocktopia Personnel:
Webmaster - Bernhard Kellerer
Website Developer - Joe Hager
News Editor - Paul Woodward
Podcasts - Steve Price

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EDITORIAL

I've read with some interest the discussion on the internet with regard to label advertising on websites and magazines. Quite a commotion seems to have been created regarding Frontiers' decision to scale back on advertising, with a few well known and respected sites making a decision to stop featuring Frontiers news/reviews etc on the back on their advertising being pulled or severely cut back. The majority of comments from the fans tend to be of the variety, 'You should still cover the releases and news, no matter what.' While I tend to agree with that sentiment, there is another side that many fans don't seem to take into account – it's ***advertising income*** that allows these sites and magazines to continue, it is their financial life-blood. If advertisers were to cut back from promoting their releases in Fireworks, the magazine simply couldn't continue – it's as simple as that. So while there have been some knee-jerk reactions out there, remember that sales of CDs have been falling consistently. For this reason, labels have to be a little more circumspect with their advertising budgets, and this has a knock-on effect with the magazines and sites you love. So for this, and many other reasons, keeps supporting the music by buying your CDs, not downloading, and buy the magazines and visit the web-sites whenever you can. Otherwise, very soon, there will be ***no*** outlets for the music we love! And ***that*** would be the biggest tragedy!

Occasionally I come across an album by an artist I would consider normally to be outside my usual tastes, and something in their music really appeals to me. A few years ago it was P!NK, who I now love unashamedly. Recently, I have been listening to Anti-Flag and have really enjoyed what I've been hearing – pop-rock-punk with attitude. Check out 'Brandenburg Gate' on Youtube. Interview coming up next issue.

In July a bunch of us are heading over to Sweden for the Vasby Rock Festival, which has an amazing line-up this year. Speaking of Vasby, congratulations to Sam Compton and Andy Bolton, who each won a pair of tickets in our competition back in #68. Yeah, the prize stated 3 winners, but only two people bothered entering. So see, it does actually sometimes pay off, for the price of a stamp J

The latest Ten CD was released by us last month, and sold out the first printing in less than a week. Reviews have generally been very positive and I hope most of you are enjoying these albums as much as we do. An extremely limited edition red vinyl version of 'Albion' has also just been made available (see back page). With only 140 available, these are sure to be valuable collectors items. No vinyl for 'Isla De Muerta' unfortunately, but the forthcoming EP, complete with three great unreleased songs, will also be released as a limited edition picture disc with newly commissioned artwork. Definitely a golden period for Ten fans!

See you all again in September!

Bruce

Ten, led by the multi-talented Gary Hughes, are swiftly approaching their 20th anniversary and are subsequently in the middle of a creative patch that is more purple than Prince's underwear drawer! A mere six months after the release of their highly lauded 'Albion' opus the band are releasing the follow up, 'Isla De Muerta', in a one-two combination very reminiscent of their first two releases, 'X' and 'Name of the Rose'. Gary Hughes spoke to Dave Crompton…

How are things in the Ten camp at this present moment in time?

Things couldn't be better to be honest. The new guys have settled in really well and the whole band are enjoying this current period of productivity. We've been "busy bees" on the recording front as you know, and we are about to embark upon another European live trip, this time to Athens. The general vibe in Ten is very pro-active as we gear up for our imminent 20th anniversary celebrations.

Has 'Isla De Muerta' satisfied your expectations?

Totally. I began developing a 26 song batch for 'Albion'; it was not unlike back in '96 when we found ourselves with enough material for 'X' and 'The Name of the Rose'. Looking at the variety of material we decided there and then this would be two albums. It was also decided that both albums would follow in quick succession and that no apologies would be made for the fact that both were developed from the same batch of songs. We were confident that the material was strong enough to stand being divided and still make for two powerful but diverse albums. Deciding which songs would go on which album was the hardest part. In the end we decided to make sure that we kept songs of the same ilk away from each other. The result was how you hear it. We felt that 'Albion' was a strong offering and we hope that the fans see 'Isla de Muerta' as being equally so.

I thought 'Albion' was right up there with the best of Ten's discography, so did this place greater pressure on you to maintain those standards? Or, did the fact that these songs were "'Albion' born", pardon the pun, make things much easier for you?

I knew I had kept enough in reserve to make 'Isla de Muerta' a strong follow up, and with the new line-up settling in, the only pressure was to make sure that we did the material justice. We took slightly longer to develop the second album simply because we set the bar so high for ourselves with 'Albion'. I conferred a great deal with Dennis Ward on 'Isla…' to make sure that I was providing him with everything he needed come the mix. Dennis has been on board mixing Ten now since 'Stormwarning'. He knows how the band sound and he mixes to his own parameters. I always value his input in the closing stages as he is the one with fresh ears to the project. Sometime it is possible to be too close or precious with the material the closer it gets to fruition. He is my sounding board and is the consummate professional.

I must highlight 'Tell Me What To Do', 'Acquiesce', 'The Dragon And St George' and 'Angel Of Darkness'; I just love the vibrancy, hooks and choruses. Do you have personal favourites?

At this stage I love them all. I tend to play the mastered mixes a lot after completion. Then, invariably, I begin work on something else and consequently stop listening to them for a while. I'm proud of all the songs on the album and think it's a very diverse and mature blend of material. I like to think that there is something for everyone on 'Isla de Muerta'.

I must also mention 'Revolution'. Like 'Right Now' off 'Heresy & Creed' it is quite a departure from the "norm". Do you enjoy pushing the stylistic boundaries?

Is it that obvious? (laughs) Yes, I do. 'Revolution' is a departure of sorts. It's slightly "industrial" in sections with drum loops and such. The French Revolution is such a great subject matter to explore. I have tried to evoke imagery of the riots in the streets, Robespierre reaping the aristocracy for Madame guillotine. For a lyricist it's richly colourful and dramatic stuff with which to squeak a nib. Generally I like to make at least one track veer laterally on each album; it keeps us slightly unpredictable and adds some small essences and flavours to the armoury.

Have you already decided which songs will make the live shows?

The live set lists are always picked through a combination of "must plays" and fan request. I think it's important to give people what they want to hear and not necessarily what you want to play yourselves. We have in the past found ourselves adapting our set list to take into account the differing tastes in different territories. I remember touring in Germany years ago, we had done five or maybe six shows in different cities and were about to play the last show there. We were in Munich as it happens, when a fan asked, "Why aren't you playing 'Wildest Dreams' on this tour?" We looked at each other in bewilderment as he proceeded to inform us that it had been a single there and of all our singles released in Germany this song had charted highest! We'd basically played the whole tour unaware that we were leaving our highest charting single out of the live show. Sometimes it pays to listen to the fans.

Has your writing/recording process changed at all since returning with 'Stormwarning'?

I've probably become more pedantic with regard to detail but the process has been the same since I began writing. The new songs were written in the age old way as far as I am concerned; I really only write one way. Melody on chord comes first and lyrics much later. In this way I get a better feel for the song as a musical piece before I have to commit to a subject matter for the lyrics. The new line-up has worked brilliantly so far in enabling me to envisage melody and countermelody for certain sections. Dann Rosingana and Steve Grocott also work together to adapt some breath-taking dual guitar pieces between them; bringing two guitar players with such differing styles was always going to bring more versatility to the band. The core of Ten has been the same for many years now, and that

core of John Halliwell (guitar), Steve McKenna (bass), Max Yates (drums) and Darrel Treece-Birch (keys) means that I have been able to experiment with guitars and guitarists, knowing that the backdrop always remains water tight and solid.

Do the band ever question your decisions/direction?

Not really. It's never arisen. I think they trust the fact that after 12 studio albums for Ten I can write a ditty or two. Ten have always endured, partly because of the musicians that have graced our ranks but also partly because I have steered us through changing times whilst maintaining the same musical flavour and integrity. I'm not Mozart but I know how to write a Ten album and we would be foolhardy to change the formula at this stage of the game. Ten have carried the torch, forgive the pun, through a difficult period in Melodic Rock history. The nineties and noughties were not an easy time for a band who would have been more at home in the late eighties. Many bands of our ilk simply fell by the wayside. We managed somehow to sustain the consistency of our output and continue against the odds. We can't change the formula now. I think that as long as Ten continue to produce albums of a high quality we will have something to offer the scene in general. Too many bands stay beyond their sell by date and I think you are only as strong as your last album. Too many bands live on past glories, which is a shame as it cheats the fans and tarnishes the legend.

It really does appear that this line-up are totally in sync and producing the best musicianship of their careers.

Thank you. I think so. The band seem more relaxed generally. My long term partners in crime John Halliwell and Steve McKenna are as solid as ever and playing more confidently and effortlessly with every year that passes. Darrel Treece-Birch, or "The Doc" as I prefer to call him, has refined his creation of sounds to an art form, his playing is in a different league and his capacity within the band is such that it feels to me like he's always been around. Max Yates has matured from being the baby of the band to being its backbone. His creative input on the drums for Ten has increased dramatically and the backdrop for Ten's live sound has never been more concrete. Dann and Steve G, as I mentioned earlier, have been the icing on the cake. It's certainly coming more naturally for Ten nowadays. I think I can speak for the band when I say that there was a time when we worried too much about the "nay-sayers". Ten have always been a "marmite" band for many. I never understood why. There have been many occasions in my career when I have wondered what some people wanted of me. On the whole, British audiences tend to stand back and say "impress me", but they seem even harder when it comes to British bands. All one can do is to remain true to oneself. We're making music we're proud of and are ever grateful to the loyal fans who continue appreciate it. The difference is that we don't lose sleep anymore over those who don't.

As part of the 20th anniversary celebrations I believe an EP is on the horizon?

Rocktopia are planning 'The Dragon and Saint George EP' for later in the year, to coincide with our 20th anniversary. Aside from the title track the EP will feature another track from 'Isla..' and three exclusive unreleased tracks. Gaetano de Falco has been commissioned once again to complete the artwork for the EP which will be on CD and 12" picture disc vinyl. With Ten being British it's quite fitting that this subject matter can be used to mark our 20th anniversary. For the song itself I've stuck to the legend and not the myriad of romanticised versions out there and the artwork will depict that. George is our patron saint and we're proud to be British.

I assume your relationship with Rocktopia Records is developing well?

Very well indeed, and a complete breath of fresh air. We had been with Frontiers in Europe since the demise of Now And Then records. I've known Bruce (Mee) for many years as a family friend as well as a business associate and so entering into another business relationship with him was always going to feel natural. I have known Kieran (Dargan) for slightly less time but like Ten themselves, Kieran has been

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GARY HUGHES OF TEN

instrumental in perpetuating this genre of music with Firefest, steering the genre through the nineties and noughties; a particularly difficult, almost cult status period of time for Melodic Rock music as a whole. We are all three kindred spirits, equally passionate about the music we love. They leave me to create unhindered, and I leave them to do business with the product. It's an arrangement that allows me total freedom as a songwriter and artist. This creative freedom has yielded two albums and has given me a new found drive and conviction. Rocktopia believe in the band and have put their money behind us. Who can ask for more?

Can you tell me about your work with Serpentine, and indeed the forthcoming debut album from Karen King?

The Serpentine guys were a blast to work with. It was nice to put my producer hat on again. Musically, I co-wrote with Chris (Gould) and Gareth (David Noon) from the band, lyrically I was allowed total freedom. Adam Payne is their new vocalist; a great guy with a great voice. The band played out of their skins and the album 'Circle of Knives' will, I think, surprise many people who considered them a lightweight unit. This album is much darker.

The Karen King debut will be the first album of songs I have written for another artist since the three albums I wrote for Bob Catley. Karen has a great voice and the collection of material we're working on is very strong indeed. Style wise it sits somewhere between Heart, Roxette and Benatar. Karen sounds great and looks great, so with the song material we have people can expect an extremely high quality debut album.

At The Gods in 2000, you boldly said your creative reservoir would never dry up. Is that still the case?

I still write more than I can ever use. I have digital mp3s of song ideas going back to '94/'95, a chorus here, a verse and a bridge there. Over the years they number into the thousands. The 26 song batch for 'Albion' and 'Isla…' came from a shortlist of over 40 songs. At least it makes sure that the ones that make it through are strong. Nearly 30 years on and I still feel humbled that people might find my music moving and inspired.

Will there be a live album, DVD, or both in the foreseeable future?

Rocktopia have lots in store to mark our anniversary. A great many things are being discussed, including live shows in support of the event which should hopefully yield a double live CD. So it's a case of watch this space on that. I'm also working on 11 original acoustic tracks for Ten as we have never made a dedicated acoustic album to date. I think it would be nice to have an album of acoustic songs where the mood isn't interrupted. A backdrop for that night in with a bottle of wine…

Can we dare wish for any future collaboration with Bob Catley?

Never say never. I enjoyed my time working with Bob. We made three great albums together and he knows I can write for his voice. The problem is that he's in Magnum mode currently, and I'm in Ten mode. Whether time will allow me another foray into Bob's solo album legacy remains to be seen. It will take a while to write another truly great Bob album, especially when we raised the bar so high with the first three. Either way I still think of him fondly. He's a gent and we had a laugh together.

Are Japan and the US realistic touring destinations?

Japan looks like happening again early next year to coincide with the 20th anniversary of the release of 'X' over there. The US has, thus far, eluded us. Ten will play anywhere there's an audience. Promoters enquiring over live dates know the cost of bringing bands like Ten abroad. No-one's prepared to lose money to do it and no one likes to work for nothing. Ten are a seven piece which makes things even harder financially. That said, we have a tour management team headed by Jason Thanos who will talk to anyone about live dates. We just have to be realistic about what's possible on the budget. I truly hope you guys enjoy 'Isla de Muerta' and I hope you'll all come out to see us later in the year for a 20th anniversary celebration.

GRAHAM BONNET

Graham Bonnet needs no introduction when it comes to Rock but people in the know also remember his more easy listening recordings from the late Sixties to mid-Seventies. A chameleon vocalist with multiple strings to his bow, he is still making an impact. Rob McKenzie met up with the man himself to talk about his new album of unearthed classics from the Seventies called 'Private I' and also his new band's album in the making.

Tell me about your new album 'Private I - The Archives Vol. One'.

I wrote all these tunes when I was with Dick James Music in London and a few of the tracks were put in the movie I was in called 'Three For All', released in 1975. Years later, my producer had the tracks on a cassette, so a studio has remixed it with the sound brought out more.

As solo singers, people like Harry Nilsson and Paul McCartney had albums out that contained a number of music styles. I grew up with the music my parents listened to from the 40s, I enjoy all types of music and decided to do something a bit different - but the album was never released.

People who only know you as a Rock singer will be surprised with the softer songs on the album.

I have about three or four voices that I like to do. I played in a dance band when I was fifteen and had to play every type of music like Dean Martin's and Frank Sinatra's. It helped me play better and learn guitar chords.

Tell me about the new album your band is doing, you are called the Graham Bonnet Band now, right?

We couldn't come up with anything better, so we stuck with the Graham Bonnet Band! My girlfriend Beth-Ami Heavenstone is on bass and Conrado Pesinato is the guitarist. We have just tracked drums and lead guitar and we are really excited about it. We are putting out two songs, 'My Kingdom Come' written by Russ Ballard and 'The Mirror Lies'. We will soon be putting the vocals on them. It's a long time since Russ and I have done anything; it's really nice - he such a great guy. It's going to be hit or miss; it's a long time since I have done something new. I hope there are enough people in the world who will give us a foot in the door. We've played some of the new tunes on the recent tour and people have been interested in them rather than just 'Since You Been Gone'! We are hoping for the release to coincide with our tour in Japan.

The gigs alongside Michael Schenker should be a big thing.

The tickets sold out within minutes apparently, when the tour was announced. I will be doing a song or two with Michael, that's one of the attractions.

At the recent UK gigs it was good to see you getting the guitar out on stage.

I play the guitar on a couple of songs; I've been playing since I was eleven; a tool to work with so I could sing along with it. I can't do the "widdles", mine is more a Blues style. I leave the fast stuff to others.

You have an extensive biography by Steve Wright being written, that should be a good read. I spoke to Dónal Gallagher to get some stories of your friendship with his brother Rory for the book.

I can't wait for the book to come out! I used to hang out with Rory in the Cromwell pub back in the day; he was opening for Cream who were in the same management company as me, Robert Stigwood's. I have written a song about Rory. It's about time – everyone praises other guitarists – so this is called 'No One's Sung for Rory'. No one realises how great he was.

I am sorry to hear Trevor Gordon (partner with Bonnet in the band The Marbles) died recently.

I still can't believe it. He was originally from Blackpool and went to Australia and that was when he played with the Bee Gees. It was Trevor Gordon and the Bees Gees originally, then the Bee Gees - with Trevor playing lead guitar.

Are you aware of the new Rainbow Box set with live CDs and the Donington Monsters of Rock DVD?

I saw something about it; is it the whole show? What I have seen is 45 minutes long. I got in touch with the camera man to try to get the whole thing about four years ago, I was also looking for the '68 NME concerts in Wembley but I can't find them anywhere. Trevor and I did two songs there, Status Quo and Joe Cocker were playing as well.

What's your connection with Slash?

Slash and Axl Rose used to come to our gigs. I remember them well before they were called Guns n' Roses; they were friends with one of the guys in Alcatrazz. They were into us and Rainbow. Slash was thrilled to play on my album – I was thrilled he played for me!

Your songwriting style is interesting; you write about unusual things, for example 'Skyfire' from Alcatrazz's 'Disturbing The Peace'.

I like doing left turns in songs and creating surprises. It's nice to do things a bit different, which I am trying to do with the new band. I like to write songs about real things.

I was living in Calimesa in LA County about 20 miles from Malibu; I was watching TV and looked out and saw a green thing in the sky. I said to my wife (at the time) "What's that? Is it a plane?" It then turned into an egg shape and got bigger and bigger and started glowing green. On TV, people started calling in, asking what this thing was. They said it was fuel burn from a rocket test. This thing was up there for an hour and looked like it was over Malibu beach. It's something that happened, an ordinary event - or was it?

That same album had a great song about James Dean called 'Will You Be Home Tonight'.

They used that for Mothers Against Drunk Driving for a radio promo in LA. I had to do a narrative in the Capitol Records building, it was nice to do something like that.

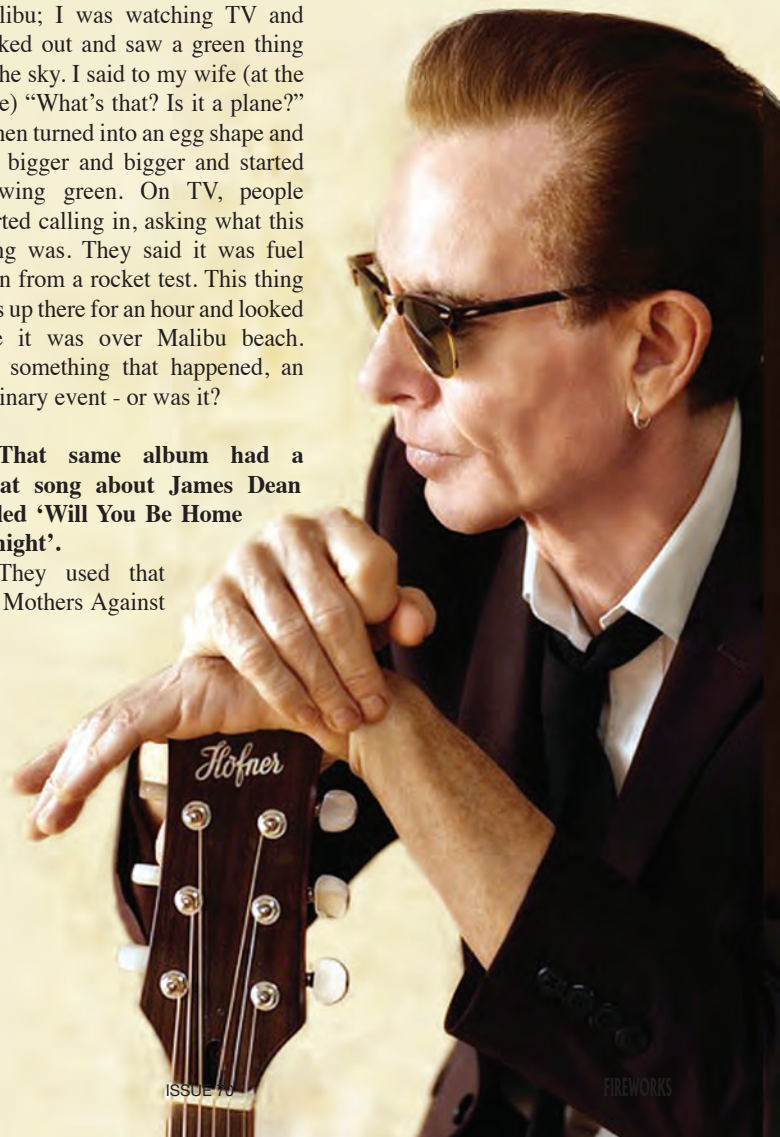
I always see your solo album 'Underground' as a forgotten gem.

'Underground' was meant to be a band album; I was playing with Danny Johnson (who joined Steppenwolf) and Kevin Valentine. Somewhere down the line it became a solo album, probably because the record company thought it would sell more. It didn't though!

Finally, there are long told stories of the microphone being set up a long way from you in the studio. Is that true?

Five feet – it was one of those things, Trevor's voice was very different from mine – he had a sweet softer voice and I had to stand way back. When I was in Blackthorne we had a gang vocal and they had me at the back of the room. My voice is pretty loud when it's in good shape!

Further details on Graham Bonnet can be found at www.grahambonnetmusic.com.



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HOUSE OF LORDS

House Of Lords are back with their sixth album since they reformed back in 2004. It's aptly titled 'Indestructible' and shows that this "Fighting Fit" band are here to stay. Ian Johnson talks with James Christian about the new album, his lyrics, what he thinks about the state of Rock music today and what's to come next for this band of indestructible survivors.

The album's title 'Indestructible' seems to be saying two things. Firstly to the fans, that hey you know what, we're still here for you and no one can hurt us and secondly it's a big "fuck you" to all the doubters who didn't think you would make it.

You're right Ian, especially the "fuck you" part. When we made the transition from the original members of HOL to who's in the band now, lots of people said it would never work. Well hey, we're still here, going strong and fighting fit. That transition you see took a lot of people by surprise and they thought this ain't HOL and a lot of them didn't accept us. We didn't care though and we went out and did a lot of shows which were great and we knew we had something, so we just carried on. Now after ten years I think we've proved something not just to ourselves but to everyone one else. We're playing all over the world this year, we've just been asked to play Loudpark in Japan which is one of the biggest Rock Festivals in the world. So although it's taken a while, things have turned around for us and this is the sixth record with the same line-up and that album title says it all. We're 'Indestructible'.

What's the glue that keeps you together, because in this day and age it's hard to keep bands together for anything more than a couple of years?

I agree, it's actually true for a lot of environments. The reason we've stuck together I think is because we all genuinely love the same kind of things, especially music. Those of us who write for the group, I think all feel that we understand each other and we get where each of us is coming from, so to go somewhere else would be a stupid thing to do. The teamwork we have as a band is amazing, it really is, I think it's also helped us a lot that we are childhood friends. The other great thing is that we know what excites each of us as song writers. Jimi and the other writers will send me song ideas, and demos which they know I will love, especially on the new album where things were flying in every day and I was just saying "Wow!". Jimi knows of my love for the heavier side of HOL music so he kept sending me all these great guitar riffs and so on. He knew that even though I love the pomp stuff we did at the start of HOL, that we needed to evolve as a band and mix the pomp with the heavier music, so that's where we are with 'Indestructible'.

That heavier edge you spoke of is everywhere on the album but the melodies are also there, so what makes a good HOL song for you?

Well you mention the melodies and they are so important in a song because they take you where you want to go when you listen to music. You can be as heavy as you want to be but if there's no melody then the song's going nowhere fast. Jimi is right up front with his guitars on this album and that's because we don't have a live keyboard player anymore. The cost of having one is just prohibitive, if times were different, sure we'd have one, but in today's financial environment it's easier to just utilise the people's talents we have in the band rather than adding a new member. We do use them in the studio but they're kept back in the songs and it's the guitars, bass, vocals and drums that now make up the HOL sound. As you said it's Jimi's guitars that are now the backbone for HOL music. And the bonus is that live we can recreate what we do on the records very easily.

What inspires you as a songwriter James? You've been around for a while now both as a member HOL and a solo artist, so what drives your song writing these days?

Well the things that inspire me now are very different from what inspired me say ten or fifteen years ago. You know ten years ago I'd write about having sex and girls; things like that you know, but now I think I write songs that are more informed, deeper and thoughtful than I used to. 'Go To Hell' for example has a very strong message, it's a quirky song that has different meanings and doesn't necessarily mean 'Go To Hell' for everyone, just some people. Or 'Ain't Suicidal' which is about somebody thinking about suicide but then deciding that there's more to life and killing themselves would be wrong. It's positive in it's message, so I hope people read the positive in the lyrics and don't get hung up on the title because it's really about someone seeing there is light and hope after the darkness. That said there's nothing wrong with writing a song that has the word "baby" in it, no matter what anyone says, I still call Robin [Beck, James's wife] "Baby" and I'm sixty-one years old, so these people need to get over themselves. In the past I've been criticised for writing what some called cheesy lyrics about girls or cars or singing about liking Rock music but God, I was co-writing those words with one of the best lyricists in the world in my opinion, Mark Baker, and if someone is calling him a rubbish lyric writer then they really don't know what they are talking about. The guy is a genius. So this time around I've kept my lyrics focused and my inspiration comes from different places now and with the strong melodies and great music we've come up with on the new CD, I think we've done a great job.

You recently played the Frontiers Festival in Italy how was that?

It was great, we really enjoyed ourselves on the day. We'd not played together for about three months but after a couple of songs we really started to nail it and all of us I think had a great time. Plus there were a lot of great bands there to watch, old friends to catch up with and the crowd were just wonderful, so enthusiastic. It was a really great experience for us. Hopefully they'll ask us back one day

Why do you think that live Rock music seems to be picking up now? You had/have Firefest, Frontiers Festival, Vasby, Sweden Rock, the West and East coast Rock Cruises plus many more to go to now, so what's changed to make people want to go and see live Rock bands again?

To tell you the truth, I'm really not surprised at all because good, no let me rephrase that, *great* music will always stand the test of time. You'll always see that good things will find a way to continue. I always hoped that there would be a lot of younger bands coming along to take over the reins and there are a few very good ones out there - not enough at the moment, but there are more every year and they're all making great records, so that's why I think there is a comeback for Rock music right now. Also us older guys (laughs) love the nostalgia, like reliving our youth, even though there's not a chance we'll fit into those T-Shirts we bought back in the day! I have to say though that it's the more Melodic Rock bands that seem to be doing very well at the moment. We ourselves have just been booked to play Loudpark in Japan which is a huge thing and getting invited to that was wonderful, then M3 here in the States has asked us to play next year. It seems that lots of opportunities are opening up for Melodic/Hard Rock bands just now. I also think that's down to the fact that not just us but all those other bands seem to have a consistency for making great albums - all with strong production values and really great songs. Because of this, this genre is once again getting noticed. It's also because Rock bands always put on great shows, they play live, no miming or tapes, just four or five musicians playing their hearts out and having a ball.

"Although it's taken a while, things have turned around for us and this is the sixth record with the same line-up and that album title says it all. We're 'Indestructible'."

James Christian from House Of Lords

You mentioned Loudpark and M3. Is the UK on your agenda for HOL?

We'll be over there supporting Robin when she plays at a new Festival called Rockingham. We wanted to play but they didn't ask us so at the moment we're touring in Spain, Sweden, Norway the Czech Republic for just over a month later this year, then it's back to the States for a few dates. To come to the UK to tell you the truth isn't easy and unless you get on the right tour, the cost of coming over there can be prohibitive. We love coming to Britain, the fans are wonderful but we have to balance the books at the end of the day just like everyone else. If we get the right tour, we'll be there tomorrow. So hopefully it won't be too long until HOL come back and Rock the UK.

I'm a big fan of your solo work James, so any plans after the HOL tour for you to do some more solo work?

Actually during the sessions for 'Indestructible' we wrote three songs that didn't make the album for different reasons, but I thought they were great songs and had more of solo feel to them than a HOL one. They didn't fit in with what we were doing on this record but I said I'll have them for my next solo project which I'll probably get around to in say a couple of years or so. I do think to keep things fresh that you need outside projects to work on, so that when you do come back to your main band you're really focused on that. So look out for a James Christian solo record in a year or two.

What's the next step for HOL then, James?

When we get back from the tour we're going to go back to my home state of Connecticut and record a live HOL DVD. The plan is to get control of everything, every aspect of the DVD process and make it the best DVD we possibly can. Then we'll work until we get the live sound just right before we even think of recording the gig. We'll set up the Pro-Tools desk for mixing the live sound. We want to make this the best HOL live experience we can, so we've found a producer and DVD director who really want to do it with us. We've also found what I think is the perfect venue in Connecticut for us to film in, and the idea is to have songs from every album we've done as HOL on it. 'Demons Down', 'Sahara', the debut, all of them will have a couple of tracks played off it for the show. Hopefully it will have a lot of songs on it that the fans have wanted to hear us play live but we never got around to. This DVD has to have everything everybody has ever wanted from us on it and because I'm a perfectionist, it has to be something we're all proud of before it gets released. It will be an epic task but believe me when I say House Of Lords are up to it.

My final question James is did you ever think when you started out as a singer that you'd still be making music today?

My honest answer is no. I thought that maybe it would last a couple of years, say when HOL broke big in the US,or five at the most and then we'd be calling it quits. Even when we got back together after 'The Power And The Myth' album I didn't see us doing more than that record or maybe one more but the fans dug what we were doing and we're still here. To tell you the truth as the years have gone by things have just got better for me, especially the HOL thing. I'm enjoying myself more these days than I ever did. Working with Jimi, Jeff and BJ is just an amazing thing as they are not just great musicians but also my great friends as well.

Let's start with a little history. It's 2012 and Sabaton have 'Carolus Rex' ready for release, when the Power Metal masters suddenly fall apart with more band members leaving their ranks than remain. Sabaton continued in a much altered state of course, however for guitarists Rikard Sundén and Oskar Montelius, drummer Daniel Mullback and keyboard player Daniel Mÿhr, Civil War was next - not amongst themselves, it was their new band's name. An EP and two albums down the line and Fireworks' Steven Reid quizzes Mÿhr on the machinations of Civil War…

"Not really," the keyboard player begins when asked if the quartet of Sabaton departees already had a new band planned when they quit en masse. "We just got together a few weeks after the split and had a coffee together. We had the idea to just start a cover-band or something but after a while we realised that we wanted a bit more but had no clue in what form. We did mention that it would be cool to have Patrik [*Nils Patrik Johansson*] as singer since we all liked his work in Astral Doors, Lions Share and Wuthering Heights. However we thought he would be too busy for that, until he just got in touch with us and said that he thought it would be interesting to do something together!"

Divorces can be messy, public affairs people divided and loyal to one or other new faction. However for Civil War the transition seems to have been a smooth one for their fans.

"I think most people have accepted the split by now," Daniel ponders. "I don't know if there are actual camps among the fans, but some have "converted" since they like our stuff more, and some think that Civil War is shite! However a majority seems to enjoy both sides."

The fans may have been accepting, but surely by their very name - Civil War - a clear message was being sent out to their previous band mates? "We were actually joking about that when we came up with the name!" Daniel laughs. "It's not really like that. It was more that the members came from two different towns that have a long history of rivalry – Falun and Borlänge – so it's not as dramatic as people might think!"

With so many of Civil War having been together in Sabaton, it was inevitable comparisons would be made between the two. However it appears a non-issue for Daniel, the keyboard player keen to focus on the different ethos behind his new band.

"I don't personally see many similarities, apart from that we both play Heavy Metal. Of course there are glimpses when I hear similarities in the music itself, but it's not something I try to avoid on purpose. We do stuff that we like, if it sounds like Sabaton it's fine by me since I'm not really ashamed of playing in the band. Though I think we have managed to step away from that quite well on the new album. However Civil War is very different, here we work more with each other and come to decisions together rather than having a main guy working and deciding which way we're heading. We do it our way and we're all extremely happy with how 'Gods And Generals' turned out. We felt a bit of pressure after our debut, 'The Killer Angels', was received so well in the media and by the fans but all the pieces fell into place really fast and the pressure was suddenly gone."

Civil War is never an easy process, but even taking that into consideration the departure from the band, just as 'Gods And Generals' was gearing up for release, of guitarist Oskar Montelius was a surprise for the fans, although maybe not so much for the band themselves.

"Not really." Daniel says honestly. "Oskar has been tired of the whole thing for many years and has just been going through the routine. When we started CW he got a bit of the spark back, but it wasn't enough in the end. We understand his decision and there are no hard feelings." Although the departure of bassist Stefan "Pizza" Eriksson maybe wasn't quite so amicable… "It was a bit of a different story… less "comfortable". It was a thing that grew, it's nothing personal, just that we drifted apart, which made it harder to work together. I think that we came to the conclusion at the right time before it became personal. It was not a totally pleasant break-up but when we let it sink in both sides realised that it was the right thing to do. For now we will keep the bass guitar on backing-tracks. We didn't want to replace Stefan really, so we're gonna keep it this way for now but I guess we'll have to wait and see how people react to the concept. If it works we might keep it that way, but if they demand a new bass player, we will have to get one."

With 'Gods And Generals' ready for the battle charge of live shows, the assault began in the band's home of Liljan, Borlänge in Sweden, something Daniel had been a little nervous about.

"It's a quite stupid idea to make the first gig at home actually because you have all the critical eyes on you. Friends and family are there to watch and the first gig is always the worst when it comes to performance. You are a bit insecure with the material even though you have been rehearsing for weeks before. It's kinda hard in the beginning to choose which new songs to play since you have no idea which will become popular, so we've used our gut feeling to guess which songs people will want to hear. We don't want to leave out old songs either but you have to find a balance." However Daniel is clear as to whether any Sabaton songs will feature in their new set. "We did play some Sabaton songs before but it didn't feel right. There are other bands that can play Sabaton songs… like Sabaton for instance!"

Given that the split from Sabaton seems to have been less than amicable, it feels a little surprising that Civil War have been announced on the bill for two 'Sabaton Open Air' festivals later in the year.

"It wasn't a hard decision really. It was a bit touchy after the break up because we didn't have much contact with each other after that. However after Graspop 2014, where we met and talked, it all loosened up…"

So will the old Sabatoners be watching the new…?

"It's nothing I've planned to do, but you never know. I'd rather watch some band that I haven't seen in a while or haven't seen before. I have witnessed almost 500 Sabaton shows, so I think I can live without it but I might stick around for a while. I have seen a show with the "new" line-up, so it's already crossed off my to-do-list…"

Armored Saint are undoubtedly an iconic Heavy Metal band. However, especially in the UK where they haven't toured for many a year, many may remain blissfully unaware of their continued existence. 2010's 'La Raza', their first full album of new material for a decade, brought them back into the Metal public's consciousness with a typically aggressive and vibrant offering that was critically well received. 'Win Hands Down' goes a step further into displaying their formidable and hugely underrated talent and if there's any justice it will see their profile soar on the back of it. Carl Buxton caught up with the remarkable and extremely personable John Bush at his home in LA …

I've heard stories from back in the day that Metallica asked you to join them as lead vocalist because James Hetfield wasn't too sure about being a frontman, both playing guitar and singing – is that true?

Yeah, I guess it was just uncertainty about whether or not James wanted to be the frontman or whether or not he just wanted to be the guitarist. Metallica was already established; it was prior to 'Kill 'em All' being recorded but all the material was ready. The way I try to explain it is that, even though Metallica definitely had a reputation and a vibe they had created, all the guys in Armored Saint were friends from the most part back to when we were eight or nine years old, so we had a strong friendship on top of the fact we had this band going. We were doing pretty well, not up to the level Metallica had gotten for themselves but we were starting to get pretty popular in Los Angeles. So for me, it was easy to say no thank you. This was my band, I was flattered, but it was never meant to be my destiny to be in Metallica! (laughs). It would have changed the face of Heavy Metal completely and I certainly don't need that kind of pressure. It was not my fate.

When you think about all the L.A. bands from that 80s explosion that are still around today but with very few original members, Armored Saint have stayed the same, apart from the tragic loss of Dave Prichard through leukaemia.

I still feel like Dave is kind of there anyway, lingering somewhere, or huddling around us in his outer body kind of spirit, but yeah, it is the same guys, even Jeff (Duncan) has been pretty much a cemented member since '91. That's twenty-four years ago, so it's a long time. There is a connection from all the guys in Armored Saint to the music and then there's that kind of weird loyalty that we were able to overcome any differences that we have, and had, and we have them, don't get me wrong! (laughs)

'Win Hands Down' is the new album and the title track is the first video, and combined with the cover is kind of like the 'West World' movie and 'Blade Runner' rolled into one.

Yeah, the cover was pretty cool, different to what we've ever done. We had friends and family involved, Joey's wife is in it, my daughter and my wife, one of my good friends is the bartender. Brett (Rasmussen) from the band Ignite is in there, so it was cool to do that, it was a real fun shoot and the picture is amazing. Originally we had an idea that we were just going to be this peripheral part and then I think somebody, maybe Gonzo (Sandoval), said "why aren't *we* in the picture?" So we kind of changed the format to us being the focus. I mean we are the band after all. We're wearing these kind of crazy costumes, going all futuristic. It was fun to do.

So which song are you going to do a video for next?

That I don't know… I love 'Mess'. 'Mess' was the only other song that was available early on iTunes. I love that song – super heavy, and cool…

You've got like a sitar in the mid-section…

Joey created this cool sound with the sitar. There's a lot of flavours – we've really pushed that, really strove to use a lot of different instruments in many places just to try to embellish the writing and really broaden it.

'Win Hands Down' has that psychedelic mid-section as well that's set the internet forums ablaze.

We know what we are – we are a Hard Rock/Heavy Metal band, there's no denying that. We obviously embrace that completely, but I think we can do lots of different things. The song 'Dive' has that piano intro and I never really sang over piano, so it was like, "Yeah, let's do it". We have a couple of songs with Hammond organ and with that sounds it was like, "Oh wow, there's a little Deep Purple element there" - I love that. I love all kinds of music, I listen to lots of different types of music and I think that any way we can incorporate that into our sound… we're pretty honest with ourselves if something wasn't feeling appropriate I think we would tell ourselves that, but the broader the better at this point.

With the likes of 'March Of The Saint' through to 'Raising Fear' your sound was always traditional Heavy Metal. On the newer albums you've gotten a lot heavier, a lot more powerful and aggressive. Is that maybe you and Joey bringing something in from your days in Anthrax?

Perhaps it could be a slight influence. Obviously I love and I always say nothing but positive things about my records that I made in Anthrax – I'm really proud of them. If nothing else it made me more open-minded about music. Certainly Joey is the conductor when it comes to writing the music and if he feels this is what's taking him as a writer then I'm all for it. I think it's heavy, not just Heavy Metal, but like heavy as in "deep". That's not to get too philosophical about it, but I just think of it as the content is heavy and that's the way it should be. When we discussed it, I said, "Dude, let's pretend we're big, pretend we're huge like we're Zeppelin, we can do anything we want!" If you have that mentality then you feel like the sky is the limit. I remember back in the day we would say things like "Well how is it going to be, can we do that live, can I sing that live, can I play that live?". A lot of the time we put those restrictions on ourselves because we were like *we can't do that live so we're not gonna do it.* That's out of the window now because I'm not worried about how we could reproduce something live. We'll figure out a way to do it or not do it and that's just the way it goes.

Armored Saint play London Electric Ballroom August 6th with Queensryche and Death Angel, and Bloodstock Festival August 7th – 9th.

JOE LYNN TURNER

Vocalist Joe Lynn Turner was recently in the UK performing some unplugged gigs. Despite a chest infection he caught in Scotland, he put on a great evening's entertainment at The Borderline in London and now Turner is scheduled to return to the UK to play the Rewind Festival. James Gaden called the singer in the Faroe Islands, where he was performing, to talk Rewind, Rated X and Rainbow…

You were critical of yourself at the unplugged show in London, you mentioned the infection stopped you from doing what you wanted to do, but you still sounded good!

Thanks, but when I went to Europe, I played with the Dynazty guys in Stockholm, and they said "Oh, we see the difference between when you were sick and now!" It was frustrating, it stopped me hitting my highs. I appreciate the kind words though - I'm much better now!

You're back in the UK to play the Rewind Festival this summer. Mickey Thomas played it doing Starship stuff and Steve Augeri did a Journey slot. Did they recommend it?

Actually, it was Kim Wilde who suggested me to the promoters. They were looking for an 80s Rocker and Kim went to bat for me, said I still sounded great and was a good guy, she really went to the wall for me. So she got me the job. Some journalists were bashing it, saying "God knows why he would do the Rewind Festival!" Why *wouldn't* I? I do three, maybe four songs, they have been pre-determined, they're in an email someplace. I play with their core band, which requires one day of rehearsal, it's all set up and I'm really looking forward to it. I think it'll be so much fun, everyone just reliving the 80s. What's wrong with that? Enjoy the good old songs. It's better than half the crap that's out there today! (laughs)

It's a great festival and it'll impress people who have maybe lost track of you since Rainbow.

Precisely! It's always good to get out there in front of people, so I'm not sure what these guys thought was the downside. It was some people in the English press, claiming my decision was "more puzzling than a Rubik's Cube". Unbelievable.

With the obvious exception of Fireworks, the British press doesn't exactly endear itself to anyone.

I know, I get misquoted all the time. I'll say something, they'll take it to the maximum and later on in the article they might put what I actually said. It's to sell magazines, I suppose.

You also mentioned about bringing Rated X over to the UK around the same time, is that still going ahead?

Aah, Tony *[Franklin, bass]* can't make it. He's got a gig with this whole Russian production, it's centred around a Russian guitarist and there's a dance troupe, ballet, a big show and they hired Tony and have him on a retainer. It's good money and Tony thought I'd be pissed but I'm not, we have to do what we do to make money. To cut to the chase, the promoter wanted Rated X. So he suggested putting someone else in to play Tony's part. But then we'd probably have Nikolo Kotzev standing in for Karl *[Cochran, guitar]* who is still recovering and if we got say a Swedish bass player to fill in for Tony… it's getting increasingly difficult to get together and rehearse. My theory, James, has always been a no show is better than a bad show. I'm not saying we would be *bad*, but we certainly wouldn't be on top of our game. How good can you be when everyone is learning the songs at home and you only have one real day of rehearsal? So I might play some shows in Japan, it's not locked down yet but if it comes off it would be me, Mickey Thomas, Mike Reno and Steve Augeri playing at Budokan. We did it last year with Haruhisa Handa who is an amazing singer, he's a Shinto priest, he has over 100,000 followers and working with him, we sold the place out. So you spend four days and basically live like a king.

I'd rather wait to see the *real* Rated X than see a watered down version when it's you and Carmine *[Appice, drums]*, with two guys standing in for Karl and Tony. It devalues the whole point of the band.

Yeah, and I've signed a lot of Rated X CD's lately, so it's not like people aren't buying it. I know that you don't sell what you used to in this day and age but I don't think it was promoted that well, I think it could be out there a bit more.

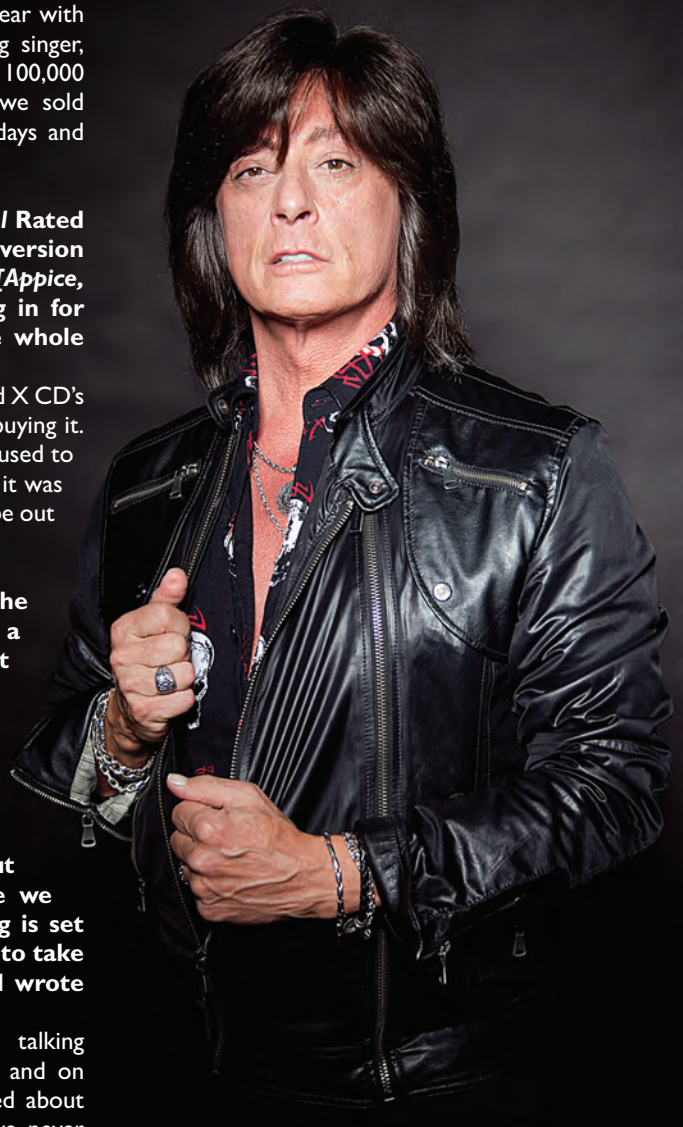
When I saw you at the Borderline, you were asked a question from the crowd about a Rainbow reunion. You gave an honest answer that you were due to meet up with Ritchie Blackmore in the autumn and have a discussion. You said you wanted to do something with Rainbow, but ultimately this was Blackmore we were talking about and nothing is set in stone. Some outlets seemed to take that as it was a done deal and wrote headlines suggesting that.

Yeah, that's exactly what I'm talking about. I used the word "possible" and on some articles, that actually appeared about two thirds of the way down! You've never misquoted me and I appreciate that, you're the last honest man.

Thank you! I wanted to get you on tape, answering that question again, and I'll put it down word for word so nobody is in any doubt what you said.

You know what James, I'll say what I said before. It was a possibility. Now it's a probability. Ritchie and I are going to be meeting. However, once we get in that room, we may look at each other over a beer and say "What do you want to do then?" It could be nothing. I could say "Let's try for a Rainbow reunion." It might be "Let's do a Blackmore/Turner Blues album". It might be remakes of old songs, we don't know! You don't *ever* know with Ritchie. However, the fact Ritchie has asked to get together and discuss it, I think that is a *massive* plus. So I used the word "probable" because we haven't met yet and there's nothing confirmed. Yes, I want to work with Ritchie again and I think a Rainbow reunion would be huge, but we haven't even met up yet. We can't do anything without Ritchie.

Joe Lynn Turner will appear at Rewind Scotland on Sunday 26th July and Rewind South on Saturday 22 August. For full details, visit www.rewindfestival.com



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KARNATAKA

It's no secret that over the years UK Prog/Folk/Symphonic favourites Karnataka have seen their fair share of ups and downs - as well as comings and goings. So it is with some pleasure that Firework's Steven Reid discovered the band's new album, 'The Secrets Of Angels', not only finds Karnataka on a decidedly even keel, it's also rather superb. Mr. Karnataka, bassist Ian Jones, takes up the story…

"The title track has a concept – war through the ages; the futility, told through the eyes of two people. We wanted to somehow tackle the white noise of war that sits in the background of our lives yet is distant for most of us. It's such a difficult, sensitive subject to broach but we felt it was something we wanted to. There is also a more personal, parallel thread of internal conflict. There are other common threads running through the album… forbidden love, despair, deceit… Perhaps we can call 'The Secrets Of Angels' a 'concepts' album?!"

A "concepts album"? Now there's a novel concept! But what of that glorious album title? "On the face of it the title may appear to be a bit flowery," Ian continues, "but in fact, the 'secrets' refer to the secrets the dying take to the grave. The things we never know about a person when they die. The things they never revealed."

As Ian alludes, the album's title track is a conceptual piece which sprawls beautifully for over twenty minutes, taking in many different ideas as it does so.

"When we're writing, some ideas will develop into longer tracks but it's not something we try and force," the bassist reveals. "Most ideas have a natural time span. 'Secrets of Angels' actually started out as the simplest of ideas – in fact just a solo vocal. I had no idea it would evolve into this twenty minute epic! I think our compositional skills have developed since the last album and this has certainly helped in terms of writing a track of this length, that works and which holds your interest. The approach is the same in some respects to a short track, you're trying to tell a story and there needs to be a dynamic across the track, but it becomes much more difficult on a longer song because you don't necessarily want to keep repeating yourself. At the same time there has to be something which binds the track together, a theme or some such."

Although they've been out on the road for both this new album and its predecessor, for two members of Karnataka 'Secrets Of Angels' is their first opportunity to put their mark on one of the band's studio albums.

"Well Cagri [Tozluoglu, keyboards] has been a breath of fresh air and has brought some great orchestration skills to the new album. He has a keen ear for new sounds too and this is something we've always embraced in the band. I've always been attracted to Eastern music and Cagri has brought some home grown influences into the sound."

Ian is just as complimentary towards Hayley Griffiths, the lead singer of Karnataka for, quite incredibly, four years now.

"Hayley has just been immense on the new album and throughout the whole writing and recording process she's put her heart and soul into this album. Her vocal range has allowed us to experiment with ideas we simply couldn't have tackled previously and it's allowed us to explore new, challenging, musical areas which has kept everything fresh. Hayley's also brought her own ideas and influences to the writing which has driven the sound forward. It's been great seeing her develop as a front woman since joining the band… she's quite formidable now!"

However with Hayley's background in musical theatre and a solo career, some saw her as a stop-gap in this ever evolving band. Ian is adamant that's never been the case.

"Hayley has been dedicated from the off. I think she's loved the challenge and she's passionate about the music. Being part of the writing team for the new album has only helped strengthen that. We've always given Hayley space to work on other projects when she's wanted to, but her commitment to the band has been huge. We have a great team vibe within the band now – the best I've ever enjoyed if I'm honest. It's quite a unique lineup in terms of each of our backgrounds but we're close friends too."

Which presumably also stretches to new drummer Jimmy Pallagrosi…

"Jimmy had been recording a session at Enrico's [Enrico Pinna, guitarist] studio and happened to hear some of our stuff, which he really liked. He was actually looking for a band he could be a part of and not just a session guy. This was perfect, as we'd been working with session guys for some time up to this point. We arranged a rehearsal and it was clear straight away that not only is his drumming exceptional but he also had a very natural feel for what we were doing."

Since 'The Gathering Light', Gonzalo Carreca, Lisa Fury, Ian Harris, Colin Mold and Matt McDonough have all departed from the band – from the outside it might appear Ian is a hard task master…

"I guess it could give that impression!" the band's fulcrum chuckles. "Well, let's clear up one point, the band has worked with session players at times and Gonzalo, Ian, Matt and Colin all played with the band on a session basis. By the time 'The Gathering Light' was released, Lisa's parents had emigrated to Australia and it was Lisa's intention to follow suit. I think too there was a feeling that we weren't all pushing in the same direction and there were frustrations creeping in. I am very passionate about the band and the music we create and in that sense I can be quite uncompromising – I don't believe creativity in any field is something that should be compromised – but I also work with a group of people who are equally passionate and push me as much as I push them. We're all striving to produce the best we can. When you have a lineup that doesn't necessarily share the same outlook it can lead to frustrations setting in."

However one "session guy" who is, once again, involved with Karnataka is Troy Donockley; a master of various pipes and whistles who seems to be just about everywhere these days. For some his inclusion on 'Secrets…' may be a clear indication of where the album is headed, although Ian, quite rightly, sees things differently.

"I wouldn't necessarily say Troy's presence is an indication of where the sound is going, although the Nightwish connection might be a truer indicator. There are Celtic influences but it's not the dominating factor in the sound, this is a much harder hitting album than any we've produced previously. I would describe it much more as Symphonic, with Progressive Metal Eastern Pop Celtic overtones! Let's see where HMV file this one!"

BEAUVOIR/FREE

Interview by Sue Ashcroft

I first saw the stunning Jean Beauvoir when he played bass for Little Steven and the Disciples of Soul at Reading Rock Festival in 1983 and from that moment I was hooked! The sheer energy and showmanship of this man, coupled with his signature, enormous, blonde Mohican hairdo meant he was hard to ignore. Fast forward ten years and I would be lucky enough to see Crown of Thorns play The Gods festival in 1993 at London's Astoria and become friends with Jean and the band. Grammy award winning guitarist Micki Free, who had previously been a member of worldwide disco sensations Shalamar was Jean's right hand man at that time and even though he subsequently left the band to pursue other avenues, he and Beauvoir remained in close contact; and now they are reunited again for the sensational Beauvoir/Free album 'American Trash', released on Frontiers Records. I spoke to Jean about the album and about his recent writing, producing and performing projects.

Your album 'American Trash' is released this month. It's exactly what I expected, which is great, but I have to ask, why under the moniker of Beauvoir/Free and not Crown of Thorns?

That's a question that comes up a lot. It's a bit confusing but you know, Micki and I did the first Crown of Thorns record and there was a lot of history after that. There was 'Lost Cathedral' and then another six or seven after that with a different line-up. We toured Europe with that line-up, we had quite a bit of success. So for one thing, I have quite a bit of loyalty to Tommy (Lafferty) and to that setup. It wouldn't be fair to be like, "Okay Tommy, you're out, Micki – you're back in," then do another Crown of Thorns record and let's forget about the past six or seven albums. Micki and I talked a lot about it and I just wasn't comfortable doing that. I just thought that if we're going to do a project again, it is what it is. Crown of Thorns was what it was at that time, it grew to be something else which we should keep separate, so if we're going to do something then let's just do it as the two of us. I know a lot of people keep talking to Micki about the debut and him being the 'driving force', but we did do quite a bit. I mean, you know, you were there from the beginning, right? We won awards for different things that we'd done – breakthrough artists and whatever – and that's why I felt, for personal reasons, that we should keep it separate. Does that make sense?

Yes, I totally get that. There's no denying that this is a great album, but you seem to have done almost everything on it yourself.

(Laughs) Is that a bad thing?

I'm not saying it's a bad thing, but if it's just the two of you on the photographs and just your name on drums, bass and everything on the album, how would that equate to the live environment?

Oh, we're putting a band together. In fact, this is getting even *more* confusing as we'll probably have Hawk (Lopez) as the drummer! You know I like to keep things interesting and never simple. On the record I play drums – that was my first instrument. I play bass of course, but we just decided to do it this way rather than bringing in someone else just for the sake of it. I always played bass on the records anyway, so that's not really any different. I haven't heard any complaints yet, so that's good.

Has it taken a long time to plan and write the songs as well as getting them recorded? You've obviously had a lot of other things going on.

Yes, it did take some time but a lot of that is based on scheduling. We wanted to capture the same feeling we had on the first record because we had a method of working on that one. We demoed things at my house – which was pretty much what we did back in the day – although of course Tony Thomson played drums on that first record. Micki would come hang out for a couple of weeks at my house and my studio, we'd write and get some basic things down, get some solos down and whatever basic parts we could do. Then he'd leave and I'd have to work for the rest of the time alone, then do it again for a couple of weeks. This happened over the course of some months. I had a little issue with my voice for a moment and that was giving me a bit of a hard time for a while, so that delayed things a little, but that came back together and everything was fine. All in all, I'd say it took several months, what with the schedules, getting everything in place and then of course the mixing and the extra stuff we wanted to do.

How many songs did you write in the first place? Did you have a lot of songs to choose from before you got it down to the final eleven?

No, to be honest we nip it in the bud from the beginning. We're very fast at writing, as far as the way we work. Micki will sit there and I'll sit here and in some instances he'll have a riff. He'll start playing the riff and I'll start singing to that riff. From there we figure out where it should go and we keep doing it. It usually happens very quickly because it's very natural and I can just hear where it's supposed to go. I kind of know right from the beginning, within the first ten minutes. At least in *our* opinion, that's how it works. Then, it goes out to you guys, then *you* decide!

And how has the feedback been?

It's been really good. It's weird because as an artist you have to wait a certain amount of time before you find out what people think and I always go through this period of doubt – a lot of doubt, to be honest with you. I'm always thinking about technical things – "I don't know if the mastering's right, I don't know if it's good enough" – I go through all of that stuff.

You've had some other pretty interesting stuff going on. You've been writing on an album for a young Korean guy which has gone to number one. Tell me how you got involved in that?

Well, I've always written for other artists, pretty much my whole career, so I've kept that going. I'm a Universal Music songwriter. I've done some stuff in Norway and for a few years I was a judge on a show where they were trying to find the best songwriters in Norway. It was a competition every year where all these producers and writers would

come and compete and the person who won would get a contract with Universal. But besides that I was also involved in different camps where different producers and writers from all over the world come together to write songs for different artists. So through doing that I've met some pretty interesting people who I've been able to co-write with and two or three of those songs have been pretty successful in the past three or four years. It's always good to keep your skills honed doing stuff like this. When I'm not doing my own stuff, I like to work on other music across all different genres. I think it keeps you in check.

You've also been working with Tommy Denander on the new Radioactive album. How was that?

Great! I was actually just listening to it five minutes before you called. If you want to know the truth, that's the first time I've heard my song finished!

Fantastic! And, does it sound good?

Yeah, I'm stoked about it. Tommy and I have been going back and forth via Facebook and email for years saying we should do something together but it's never worked out. Then, I ran into him in Las Vegas when I was out there with the KISS guys and he happened to be there. He sent me a message, we met at the ice cream shop and I played him some of the songs from the new record. He said, "You know what? I'm doing this new Radioactive record and I have a song that I think would be perfect for you, if you're interested in doing it?" He sent me the track, I listened to it and then I wrote melody and lyrics to it, sent it back and he went, "Great! I love it – we're there!" and next thing you know it's one of the final songs on the record. I love his guitar playing, he's a bad ass, there's no doubt about it! The album came out in the last few weeks and it's getting great reviews. I'm honoured, because there are some amazing singers on that record.

I saw you mention recently that you had some European tour dates in the pipeline. I know that you've played a few dates in Norway and elsewhere in Europe. You had a couple of UK dates scheduled in last year, but they ended up being cancelled. So what are the chances of you finally coming back to the UK with the release of this album?

To be honest with you, we're trying very hard and at the moment we have several dates pencilled in. It all depends on whether or not we can get enough to make it financially viable to do so. We really want to do it, we really want to get over there but it depends on so many things. We really do hope it happens though.

Well, we very much hope that the tour happens and we finally see the return of Jean and Micki to the UK. 'Are You Ready?' You bet we are!

Jack-of-all-trades Amanda Somerville and German Metal legend Michael Kiske have finally hooked up again to present us with 'City Of Heroes', their second production together. Having had the chance to talk to the lady herself, Julia Braun remained impressed with the energy, warmth and love for music that this "highly sought after" mother-to-be shared.

'City Of Heroes' lets the feeling evoke that you and Michael Kiske are even more of a team this time around. Can you tell us a bit about the history of you and Michael working together?

I definitely agree – since working on the albums and doing the music videos together, plus touring together with Avantasia, we've gotten to know each other very well on a personal level as well as professionally. We worked distantly on mutual projects like Aina and Avantasia before ever meeting face to face in 2010 for the first time at the video shoot for 'Silence'. The decision to do this duet together actually came from Serafino Perugino, the owner and chief of Frontiers Records. He commissioned Mat Sinner to produce the album and find a partner for Michael and Mat asked me. After I heard some of the demos, I was really excited about being the other half of the duet!

Five years after your first collaboration with Michael, I would be curious to know what, if anything, was different this time around?

Well, knowing each other made a huge difference. Not only has my personal and professional experience been expanded upon in that time with Michael, but also with Mat. We've worked extensively together on the Rock Meets Classic tours and touring is always a big bonding time. I felt much more comfortable in expressing my opinions if I had suggestions on a creative level and also in knowing what I could expect. I was at ease and also took some liberties with the vocal lines, lyrics and ad-libs that I hadn't the first time around.

If I may ask without sounding rude, what took you five years to release a follow-up?

Ha-ha! Not rude at all. I know it's been quite a stretch, but it couldn't be helped. We're all just so busy that it's taken this long to coordinate our schedules for song-writing, recording and meeting up for the videos. In this business, it's definitely a luxury problem.

In lots of other collaborations, it tends to be only one member doing the actual writing, making decisions about the song selection and in several cases even covering the production. What is it like in your case and why?

Well, since this is a bit of a unique project in that Michael and I didn't start it and aren't the main handlers of the business decisions, it's actually a pretty easy gig for us. I do try to be involved in the creative process because, if my name is on the front, I want to do more than just "show up and sing". Frontiers and Mat do most of the deciding, but I'm given creative freedom. On the debut album, I had three of my own songs on there, and on this album, 'Breaking Neptune' is one I wrote together with my husband. I might have been able to have more songs on there had I not delivered my demos suuuuuuuuuper late in the game! I was just so darned busy and by that time, Mat and Magnus already had so many great songs, there wasn't really a need for any more material. But even on their songs, I worked on some of the vocal melodies, lyrics and division of parts.

Questions about touring are sure to arise. Are there any plans yet?

I would love to present our songs to a live audience someday! At this point, however, there are no plans for a tour or special show simply because we have so many other commitments and our "down times" don't coincide. Michael has Unisonic and I've got my solo album I'm currently working on, then a new Trillium album is next in line, combined with all of the bands I work with doing guest appearances, producing, coaching, writing songs for, etc. in between! BUT, never say never!

How do you manage to reconcile and arrange all your contributions to various projects?

Scheduling and planning are always problematic, particularly because it's further complicated by my living in three different countries and trying to juggle my personal life as well! But, I try to keep my priorities in line and save enough relaxation time for myself because I know so many people who have had burn-outs. I try to be very careful to get enough rest and recreation time and I'm also not a "partier," which has been both a blessing and a curse because I choose to put my health and state of well-being before hobnobbing and having a good time with people in the industry. I'm sure I've missed out on lots of opportunities because of that practice, but I honestly feel like I'm a healthier and happier person not having always played the "entertainment biz" games.

How do you choose which projects you will take part in and alternatively which you might not?

Honestly, it's quite the honour for me to be asked by so many artists, bands, projects and who and whatever else to lend my services to their music. Certainly some of that comes from what people have seen or heard of my previous work or wanting to capitalise on the "success" associated with my name. I used to have the philosophy that I'd never say "no" to a request, just because I felt that each new collaboration helped me grow and evolve as a musician, especially if it was something I wouldn't normally do. I definitely consider any band's request seriously, regardless of their status.

What have you lined up for the near future that you can share with us?

The biggest priority for me right now business wise is getting my solo album finished, then I'll be starting work on a new Trillium album. I've got some other things in my magic hat of ideas, but I think it'll be a while until I can get to them! I'm also doing some guest work alongside Russell Allen for an Italian project called Magni Animi Viri, which I'll finish in June and also a small part as the classic "Little Mermaid" character in a song for a Russian band named Catharsis. Of course, I love continuing the Kiske Somerville collaboration and always look forward to the next Avantasia happenings!

"I do try to be involved in the creative process because, if my name is on the front, I want to do more than just 'show up and sing'."

Amanda Somerville

One of the biggest projects you are part of is the production of the annual, impressive, Rock Meets Classic shows. Can you tell us a bit about your experiences with these shows?

Rock Meets Classic is a wonderful outfit that fulfils a lot of my desires from a pure vocal standpoint. Mat Sinner asked me to be in charge of the choir and do some occasional features for the show after we'd done the recordings for the first Kiske/Somerville album together. This isn't something that will ever necessarily further my career, but it's just so fun and exciting to do that I can't turn down the experience. Not only do I get to perform with these fabulous people, but I get to share the bus, the backstage and downtime with them, hearing amazing stories and getting great advice. It's priceless!

You have gotten married and are also pregnant as well, I would firstly like to send my personal congratulations to you and your husband. Will you be taking a break - will you be able to?

Thank you very much! You know, I've enjoyed my pregnancy so much. I decided to continue with business as usual and not let it limit me in what I do, so my baby has already had a first photo shoot and two video shoots with Kiske/Somerville and a first Rock 'n' Roll tour with Rock Meets Classic! I think this is bound to be a musical babe. Now that I'm thirty-two weeks along, I'm slowing down a bit. I really want to savour these last weeks of my crazy belly, the movements, the nesting and so I only have a couple of things planned that have a specific deadline. After that, I'm going to see how things go and not kill myself to try and get everything done - referring to my solo album. I definitely won't be doing any more touring this year. This is such an important time in our lives and I want to be sure that we have the time and energy to focus on our greatest work yet!

After all those years, how do you keep your energy levels, the quality of the music and your general positivity so high?

Like I said it is about my priorities, I really think that's the key in my overall physical health and well-being. I try not to have expectations, acknowledging and enjoying every little good thing that happens and channelling any frustrations and negativity out through my performing and writing; kind of exorcising my own inner demons that way. Family is the most important aspect of life to me and spending time with them is always cleansing and energising for me. My Mom is a very positive, friendly, bubbly, nurturing, energetic go-getter of a super woman and she's my biggest influence and role model. My Dad too, with his "you can do anything if you set your mind to it and work hard" attitude, creative business thinking, strong family values, great support and musical talents. I owe all that I am to them.

If you could make one wish for your future, what would that be?

That I'm able to make a difference in the world and make it even just a little bit better than it might have been before. Sounds corny and Hollywood-American, but it's what I've always wanted and believed since I was a kid! Every time someone sends me a letter or an email saying, "your song/music/voice saved me at a time when I had no hope in my life," or something to that effect, I feel immense joy and confirmation that my dreams are truly being realised. It's the best incentive to keep making music!

MICHAEL DES BARRES

With a successful music career fronting Silverhead, Detective, Chequered Past and famously, the Power Station, Michael Des Barres has also enjoyed a prolific acting career, seeing him appear in hit TV shows and films alongside the likes of Clint Eastwood, Steven Seagal, Sidney Poitier and many more. He returned to music when he released the Faces and Steve Marriott inspired 'Carnaby Street' in 2012 and has just unleashed 'The Key To The Universe', a back to the roots, thunderous Rock record that has seen him receive some of the best reviews of his impressive career to date. James Gaden met up with Michael in London to learn more…

'The Key To The Universe' really threw me when I first heard it. I was expecting a follow up to 'Carnaby Street', which I really loved. But this, it's heavier; it's this raw, booming, powerful Rock album, a completely different beast. You recorded everything analogue, with completely different musicians. Why was that?

I didn't really come up with it on my own. Bob Rose, the producer, is someone I really credit with the inspiration behind it. He called me and said "Come to Rome and make a Rock 'n' Roll record." Nigel [Harrison, ex Blondie and longtime MDB cohort] was going to be there and two guys who I had yet to meet, which was Dani [Robertson, guitarist from the Jimi Hendrix Live Experience] and Clive [Deamer, drums, ex-Portishead and Robert Plant]. Bob said "I want to make a Rock 'n' Roll record with you Michael and I want you singing like you're 21 years old." I just thought "Wow…" As you know, I've been through a lot of incarnations. I've picked up some habits, you duplicate things, you start doing things because you think people will dig them,and you get away from the original intent. The original intent was to sing the Blues and get laid. But other things cropped up, I ended up being a hired gun with the Power Station, it became like a job. I kind of lost the relationship of why I did music in the first place.

When I got there, Bob played 'Johnny', an old Silverhead song which was done on acoustic guitar. So I sang it like I did when I was 21 years old. Bob then said "That's the guy I want to record." So I turned up with 20 sets of lyrics, ready to just be the singer. I didn't want to be cracking the whip, Nigel was there, who was brilliant. Clive Deamer had played with Robert Plant, he's brilliant. I could just sit and listen to him drum. Dani Johnson – incredible. We wrote all but three songs, 'Room Full Of Angels' from Peter Wolf, 'Burning In Water' which was by Jeff Silbar, and 'Can't Get You Off My Mind' which was Linda Perry's. We recorded those songs and it was effortless. If I'm not certain what's going on, I'll choose a voice and I'll be that voice for the record. 'Carnaby Street' saw me choose a swaggering, Faces-like guy, and it was so much fun and the band was great. This though, is a whole other category. It's authentic and it rocks like fuck! I'm the number one most played Rock 'n' Roll artist in the United States at the moment. Six weeks – can you believe that? Extraordinary. It's taking off in Germany where I just did some appearances. Why? Because it's so infectious. It's addictive – it's like a drug. After having done so many drugs myself, I think I deserve it. (laughs)

You mentioned Linda Perry's song and it's a great fit. Was that written for you?

No. I know Linda well, she's fantastic, she's more Rock 'n' Roll than 90% of the dudes out there. She had written the song about a lover of hers who left her. She put together Deep Dark Robot, which was one of her projects and Nigel, being the intuitive guy he is, he was an A&R guy at Interscope for years, he has this treasure trove and when he heard Linda's song he said "That's an MDB song." He brought it to Rome with the other two covers and we had a starting point, rather than Clive, Dani, Nigel, Bob and I trying to create a sound.

There's some nice light and shade on the record though, it's not all bombastic. The closing track 'Supernatural Lovers' for example is more Psychedelic Funk.

Yeah! It has a great groove and I just wanted to talk over it. You know me, I talk a lot! If you listen to the lyrics, I mean every syllable, when we do it live, that will be a chance for me to ad-lib and improvise. There's a lot on this record I've never said before.

With you recording it all analogue, and with the running time being about 35 minutes which is like an old vinyl record's running time, is that a format you would look at?

Oh yeah, totally. It'll come out on vinyl in a couple of months. People like to have vinyl – vinyl *is* rock 'n' roll. That crackle and hiss is as sweet as your first kiss. Analogue *is* rock 'n' roll. You can't compress it. Compression is exactly what it sounds like – you're compressing the very power you are

"I think this is without question the best album I've ever made. It's the most cohesive, it's singular, authentic, personal and I'm telling the truth. The rest of it was often an infusion of a character."

Michael Des Barres

turned on by. The next album I do will be even more fucking hard and loud.

You seem happier about your music than perhaps at any other point in your career.

Oh, absolutely. I think this is without question the best album I've ever made. It's the most cohesive, it's singular, authentic, personal and I'm telling the truth. The rest of it was often an infusion of a character. Silverhead were great, but I was 21 years old. That was a swaggering thing and I was learning who I was. This album is very much who I am.

I keep finding new things about it – on the way down here to meet you, that was the first time I'd listened to the album with headphones…

Oh my God, a completely different experience! That's a world class producer for you. Sonically, you hear bits and pieces you don't hear from your stereo or in your car. When you put on the cans, you really get the depth of it. You see, it was made in a massive room in this studio which was where Ennio Morricone made all those sweeping soundtracks for those Spaghetti Westerns. It was built for orchestras and it was huge, so in the great tradition of Jimmy Page, where he would record John Bonham in this huge vestibule, we had a similar setup. It's all about where the microphones go, so Bob Rose would literally cup his ear to figure out where they sounded the best. You're getting the best possible sound – there's no effects on anything. There's no tweaking this, overdubbing that, doubling this... fuck off! You're hearing exactly what happened in that room. Isn't that incredible? That was how Glyn Johns did it, how Jimmy Miller did it, how Sir George Martin did it, all the great producers. They would place the microphones where it felt right to capture the best sound. From Rock 'n' Roll music, to a girl with a cello, if the music is true and authentic, if the artist means it, people will embrace it.

Technology offers so many choices, you can have so many effects, plugins, unlimited tracks, sometimes people feel that because the option is there they have to use it, and it can lose that spark, become too polished or too overblown.

I think you've just described 'Chinese Democracy'. Don't get me wrong, Axl Rose is brilliant, I love him, but that was an example of a man who didn't know when to stop. I wanted to do less. Dani fronts the Jimi Hendrix Live Experience and that's why we did 'Supernatural Lover', to allow him to weave in that Hendrix-like wah-wah. He doesn't bend strings like every other guitarist who listened to Buddy Guy. I'm not into those fast, diddly solos. Mick Ronson, to me, was the guvnor. He played the song, just because there is a solo part in a song, that doesn't mean everything has stopped and all the lights are on you. The band are still playing, so the track is what is important, the solo should pull you in, not be an indulgence. I know what I like. I like Marshall stacks. I like Les Pauls. I don't like Auto Tune. I don't like Photoshop. I don't like Botox. I don't like artificiality.

It's amazing you've lasted as long as you have in the States then.

(Laughs) America is very accommodating to the individual, even though it is riddled with artifice. I'm quite isolated from that world because I don't require their assistance, I can be as iconoclastic as I like. This album is a statement of individuality. You can remain an individual even if you're in a relationship. If our society stops producing individuals, it will never grow. I'm a great champion of the individual, whereas most people in America go for what is popular. 'The Key To The Universe' is a statement of individuality. That's why it hurts when a band you take to your heart breaks up. That's the thing with Rock 'n' Roll, usually it ends acrimoniously. Some bands might remain together simply to tour and make money, but it's hard. It is like a relationship. Fortunately, with this band, we had a beautiful locale, new material, everything was fresh, and we didn't stay long enough to get on each other's nerves. That will come later. (laughs)

An extended version of this interview can be found at www.rocktopia.co.uk

PYRAMAZE
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The melodic metal band Pyramaze are finally back with their fourth album "Disciples of the Sun"! The album features the band's new vocalist Terje Haroy who will surely impress many people with his stunning performance! Produced, mixed and mastered by Jacob Hansen [Volbeat, Amaranthe, Evergrey]

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ULTERIUM RECORDS

Since forming in the early nineties, Kamelot have released ten studio albums that have constantly given their loyal fans varying interpretations of Power Metal. In 2012, Tommy Karevik replaced established vocalist Roy Khan before the band released their last studio album 'Silverthorn'. Now just under two years later, Kamelot have returned with their eleventh release entitled 'Haven' and Dave Scott put together some questions for Oliver Palotai to find out more.

In January, you announced that you had signed a deal with Napalm Records; what was it that drew you to Napalm?

We chose the company with the best vision for the band. Napalm introduced a well- organised and enthusiastic plan and we had a very good personal impression of the people working for them.

Tommy Karevik has been your vocalist for a reasonable amount of time now; how have the fans of the band taken to him and adjusted to this change?

To be honest, we expected a harder transition period from Roy Khan to Karevik. So it came as a big surprise that there were so few negative comments. The rest – not only from the diehard fans – was enthusiastic. For Karevik, it was surely not easy to replace Khan so all these positive feedbacks made his job much easier.

Your latest album entitled 'Haven' has just been released. Firstly, how did you arrive at the album title? Is it a case of simply the strongest track or does it carry a much deeper and wide ranging meaning?

It is about the present and the near future, about the fact that we live in pretty crucial and dangerous times. We have futuristic availabilities like Robotics, Artificial Intelligences and Biotechnology yet you can also see the return of old-style imperialism and barbarism, like with IS, and of course most of all, there is the ecological threat. I think a lot of our decisions nowadays will deeply change the world of our children. The songs of 'Haven' are mainly about this. "Haven" itself means, for us, a place everyone has to create to feel safe whether that is music, family, a real place etc.

What can those fans that have yet to hear the new album expect from 'Haven' and how would you describe its sound? I know you don't like to compare albums as such but what elements from your previous albums might they find present and what new facets do you feel you have introduced?

There might be a stronger reference to 'Black Halo' than with the recent albums. I personally liked the production on that one a lot – it is for some aspects even a reference album for other productions I do. On the other hand, we never want to copy ourselves and the orchestration/ keyboard side of the production gives unlimited possibilities to change the sound. I combine natural instruments with synthesizers and grooves. There's infinite ways to go with that.

Was the theme intentional when you set about writing the album or something that just sort of happened?

The loose theme about a dystopia and the changes of the times that we are living in is something we discuss a lot on the tour bus but it was pretty clear that it wouldn't be a "real concept album" right from the start.

I understand this was the same writing team as for the previous album – I believe even down to Bob Katsionis returning to co-write. How does the writing process now work in Kamelot and how did it go specifically for this album?

There is no general rule. For 'Haven' Thomas Youngblood and I met for about ten days at my studio in Germany. We wrote the basic structure of about seventy-five percent of the songs. In addition to that, I put down some ideas working on my own. 'Under Grey Skies' and 'Here's To The Fall' were created like that. Then we work with Karevik to come up with vocal lines. Sometimes we rearrange the songs during this part of the process but generally lyrics always come last. Usually, we don't have any song-writers from outside the band, –Sascha Paeth I see practically as a sixth band member – but Katsionis sent some cool ideas which we used mainly for two intros – 'Liar Liar' and the Japanese Edition bonus song.

You once again have some highly recognisable names as special guests. Did you write the songs they appear on with these particular people in mind or was it an evolution of the songs as things progressed?

We certainly wanted Alissa White-Gluz

to be on the album again; that was the only guest we had in mind right from the start. The ballad '...Skies' was originally written for Karevik only. The idea to include Charlotte Wessels from Delain and Troy Donockley from Nightwish came later which also meant major re-arrangements of course!

How did you go about approaching them and getting them involved?

We know them all personally from tours and festivals in the past. White-Gluz was with us on tour before she became the singer for Arch Enemy. Delain have supported Kamelot a couple of times and we know Donockley – the third guest – from the long U.S. Nightwish tour in 2013. So, while writing the songs, certain parts are ideal for guest appearances and then you turn, preferably, to friends within the scene.

As you mentioned, Sascha Paeth has once again produced the album but for the mastering you turned to Jacob Hansen. What does Sascha bring to the table that makes him the ideal and integral choice and what factors came into play with your decision to turn to Hansen for the mastering?

Paeth is just a fantastic musician and producer as well as being a contributor to the song-writing. He is also one of the funniest and nicest people in the music business whilst being super-creative and very honest. The latter resulted in some heated arguments, sometimes, but that is normal in a musical family. We chose Hansen for mastering because we heard some of his recent work and really like it. Sometimes it is useful to change certain parts of a production even if previous choices have proved to be efficient decisions in the past.

In April you released a full video for the song 'Insomnia'; why did you select this track and what is the video about from a visual perspective?

The choice for the video clip songs is never easy. We vote and discuss within the band and we talk to the label and fans. Especially with this album, it was really hard to decide. 'Insomnia' shows the aforementioned dystopian aspect of the album, one that is embedded in a Sci-Fi theme. We have at least two more videos coming up, but we haven't decided yet for the songs.

How does the final and completed 'Haven' compare to what you original envisaged in your mind when you all started work on it? Is it vastly different or is this one of those times when it all is as you had in your mind's eye?

In the past, when I was less experienced as a musician and producer, the result of a production was often very different from the initial vision. It comes with experience that this gap closes over time. Nowadays I hear the music in my head and I can create it almost 1 to 1. It is comparable with improvising. My students learn a scale

and then they randomly play notes. An experienced player only plays the notes he wants to play. A whole production is not different.

Were there any tracks you wrote that your really wanted to include?

When you work with a producer – like in our case Paeth – some material always gets cut out. All the songs I wrote or co-wrote with Youngblood and Karevik are on 'Heaven' but some parts were heavily altered during the process. So I have a kind of storage file where the unused parts are and I might use them in the future.

'Haven' has some superb artwork; who designed the album cover and how does the image tie in with the musical side?

The artwork was created by the German artist Stefan Heilemann. He is one of my best friends, and we discuss extensively the artwork before he started working on it. He took the dystopian aspect of the whole plan and created these wonderful images.

You have a lot of touring lined up this year; you are in North America right now, with Europe lined up later in the year. How is the North American tour going and having already played the U.K. in March this year, do you have any plans to return anytime soon?

So far it's been the best start of a North American tour I can remember; awesome turnouts and a great response from all the audiences. I hope it continues like that. The U.K. will surely be part of upcoming tours, but after playing two dates there in March it won't be included in the first leg of the European Tour.

You are fast approaching your 25th Anniversary as a band; do you have any plans to mark that momentous achievement in any way? Is that a potential opportunity to do a one off special show with a full orchestra and choir?

We have a couple of plans in mind, but we've been so busy otherwise that there was no time for anything concrete. An orchestra show would be great – especially after I worked with Epica and Doro in the past on their orchestral records – but we have the feeling that a Kamelot DVD regarding this should be more than the usual line-up. So, for now, more planning is needed.

Given we are talking about quarter of a century, what achievements are you as a band most proud of from all that time?

I think the position and the long, successful career of Kamelot is something we can be proud and very happy about. I produce for a couple of younger bands and I experience how difficult it is to be successful in the music business nowadays. So I don't take anything for granted.

Europe's new album 'War Of Kings' marks a triumphant point of their career. Not only is it the most mature recording the band have produced, but it finds their sound at the point they originally intended it to be all those many years ago growing up on a staple of 70s British Classic Rock. 'War Of Kings' is also the band's fifth album since their reformation – or second half of their career if you like – equalling the original five album output from their earlier time together. To find out more, Carl Buxton spoke to singer Joey Tempest after the band's UK tour…

I've noticed that you've generally started the shows on this tour with 'War Of Kings' and 'Hole In My Pocket', the first two songs from the new album. It's a pretty bold statement from you guys because this is like saying "We've got a new album out and we're gonna play you the songs."

Yeah, it was kind of crazy but we really enjoyed it and it's important. That's why we keep going as a band because we always record the albums that we wanna make ourselves and also we wanna play them live. It makes us want to go out and play, otherwise we would get bored. We did four or five new songs. We did 'War Of Kings', 'Hole In My Pocket', 'Praise You', 'The Second Day' and 'Days Of Rock 'n' Roll'. We really enjoyed that. We've never had a shuffle before at that tempo and it was kind of uplifting to us when we rehearsed the album…we thought that's kind of different. So yeah, we wanted to put it in the live set because it's different, it's a kind of a people come together song.

What I would love to have heard though, and this is my personal choice, is 'Children Of The Mind'. I think that is one of the most powerful songs you have written, and it goes along with 'Doghouse' from the last album. 'Doghouse' for me is one of the best songs you've ever written alongside now 'Children Of The Mind'.

That's a cool song. That is actually one of the songs that we discussed playing, and it was very close to being chosen. I'm sure we're gonna try that sooner or later, maybe this summer at the festivals when we have longer set times. It's kind of difficult when we have a shorter set to squeeze in all those songs, but that's definitely one of the band's favourites too; that one and 'Nothin' To Ya'. We tried 'Nothin' To Ya' at one of the shows and that worked out pretty well too, so yeah, during the year I'm sure we're gonna play most of the album.

This is the fifth album of your comeback and on the first part of your career you did five albums as well. I'm just wondering how do you feel right now – are you happy, are you content, is everything going according to plan?

Yes, it's pretty amazing that we've done five records now in the second part and five in the first. The most amazing thing is that this period is almost a little more interesting than the first period. I mean the first period we were involved in the 80s phase, we were one of the bands that were prominent in bringing, maybe, a certain sound in and taking Hard Rock to the radio and videos. This period is different, we're going on a different journey and we're trying to dig deeper and trying to find the core of Rock 'n' Roll. Trying to figure out how the big guys did it, you know, and trying to get better. Now we're not sort of part of an 80s movement, now we're doing our own thing and it's kind of nice to just be outsiders like that.

Yeah, there's no big record company telling you what to do – you have to be here for this press interview, there for that press interview, or go there for that TV appearance tomorrow and there's a signing session on this day…

Yeah that was pretty crazy, there was too much of that. Now we can at least be in the driving seat and if we want to do promotion and stuff we do what we want to do. We tour the way we want, which is really nice but we have to stay current by working in studios and with producers and learning about gear, so that's also part of the journey now – getting better at recording as well.

There's a lot of Deep Purple influences on the album, 'Praise You' for example. The ballad 'Angels (With Broken Hearts)' has got Purple touches on it. Mic Michaeli certainly seems to have swotted up on Jon Lord – that's really coming out.

Yeah, he actually worked extra hard on the Hammond bits on this one and we used a Mellotron as well, an old veteran kind of keyboard. Automatically, I think, the influences you get between fifteen and twenty-five as a young woman or a man are very profound, they stick with you forever. But after that you sort of go on life's journey but then eventually they'll come back, automatically. So when we go into the studio now there's no escape from our earlier influences, they just come out - they're just there and together with all the experiences, after a thousand gigs or whatever it's clear we're becoming a deeper band with more of a deeper expression, that's what it feels like. When people talk about "So what have you got left to do?", we just say to find that expression, find a deeper expression that some of the big guys have. That's a journey in itself, just try to play with a bit of Soul, with Blues, a bit of emotion that maybe is not so guaranteed coming from Scandinavia, you know, so it's something that we have to earn.

I talk to a lot of Europe fans… You've got the ones that are dead set in the 80s and complaining that Europe aren't doing all the big melodies and harmonies with the big sound; they're really disappointed now with this bluesy Classic Rock sound. Then you get the other fans like myself that are embracing the fact that you're making albums like this.

It's kind of interesting how you look at it, yeah, it's the way it is. If you compare it to Rush, for example, they have a cult following - a huge following - but they've also taken different turns in their career to make themselves excited and to make themselves try harder. That's what we do, we're just following a journey and hopefully the fans will follow, and I think they will. It's just that sometimes it comes as a little bit of a shock what we do but I think they follow us anyway, and they come to see us live, and they do get to hear some of the old stuff live. Everybody seems to come together behind us, and that's the idea, because we can't really write like that anymore, even if we try we wouldn't be excited about writing albums like 'Out Of This World' or 'The Final Countdown.' I mean they're great albums but we have another journey. We want to write other songs, we want to find a deeper expression. We're proud of those albums but we want to move on and do other stuff and continue the journey.

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Dennis Churchill Dries

Some guys demand respect. Standing well over 6' tall, and carrying a 12 string bass, Dennis Churchill Dries is one of those guys. The quietly spoken bassist - well multi-instrumentalist in fact - has always let the music do the talking. With the imminent release of 'I', his first solo album and his first recorded work in twenty years, Dennis now stands on his own two legs in difference to having always been part of one of the greatest acts ever, White Sister. Armed with the questions, Kieran Dargan…

After White Sister performed at Firefest there was a lot of talk and discussion regarding the possibility of a third White Sister album. Sadly, as we are all aware, Rick Chaddock passed away. I wondered if any of the material on 'I' was material perhaps started with the intention of being White Sister songs or is the album essentially newly-written material with the sole intention of it being for your solo album?

It's all new material. I thank you and Bruce Mee for badgering us for a few years until we gave in and agreed to do the shows - that's what really got us going again, and the reception we got from the fans is one of the factors in moving forward myself. After the Firefest shows, Rick and I started working up some unreleased White Sister material that we used to play live but never recorded and that was our focus when he got sick. I have demo tracks for two of those songs we did together and another song Rick wrote that I have in my pocket. Who knows, maybe those will come to light one day!

In 2010 you basically said that everybody was really, really busy with regular life, families, day jobs and all that and a White Sister album wasn't going to happen. I assume it was around this time that Rick was diagnosed and everything musically and personally screeched to a shuddering halt?

"Life is what happens to you while you're busy making other plans." Rick was *very* private about his life and health issue. We are always busy with day jobs, family, and we were making time to work on music again when he got sick. It was Rick's choice to keep it all private.

It's often been said, by way of comparison, playing acoustically people tend to feel naked or exposed in difference to being in a band situation where you can hide a little and no one notices the odd dropped note. What percentage of this would be true in your experience of recording this album?

Wow, great question! Truth is, we always tried to write songs that could stand on their own acoustically and would often present songs live in that format. With Tattoo Rodeo, Rick and I would walk into the local radio station while on tour and play live over the air any chance we got, nothing to hide, warts and all! Some of the best moments for me at Firefest, I think, were the stripped down intro to 'Can't Say No' and the piano/vocal sections of 'Save Me Tonight'. So stripping the performance focus down for me was never an issue, I'm up for the challenge. For me the issue on releasing 'I' was the song-writing. I know what to expect when I sing but songwriting completely on my own is the "naked on stage" experience I was up against. I started the writing process when Rick was sick and would drive to his house and play him demos on the couch… "get up and put some guitars on this one." I would try to push him to get well emotionally. I realised I had to finish what I started by myself, and that was a whole new world for me, that was the challenge. Being alone and working the music all the way through by myself was the unknown. It was one of the most amazing things I've ever had to go through.

You teamed up with Paul Sabu for 'I', he contributed guitars and backing vocals to the album. How did this collaboration begin?

Paul and I were brought together by Eric Ragno for a band project that never materialised. We started working on my songs to get the ball rolling with demos and Paul realised what was happening during the process, he saw the solo album before I did. Paul and I worked together on the first Tattoo Rodeo album back in 1991 and once we got going it was like I found my long lost brother! I think Rick sent him to me somehow, there has to be a reason why another great talent like Paul fell into my lap after losing Rick… he knew I needed help!

The songs on 'I' range from the fist pumping 'Heard It On The Radio' and 'She Loves You' to the more laid back

'Pieces' and the poignant 'So Good To See You', a big mix of this that and the other but at all times, if you will forgive me, old school in as much as it's *all* about the song.

I'll take that as a compliment! I think the genre is missing the songs that get stuck in your head. I love cranking up some good Melodic Rock and playing the drums on my steering wheel, singing along… that's what's missing in my opinion, that's what I grew up on. 'Radio' touches on that subject a bit. If you're saying I've captured some of that spirit, then I've succeeded with this album no matter what happens!

Could I ask you for your interpretation or the thought process in relation to 'So Good To See You'? I'm sure we all know it's essentially a song about Rick Chaddock. Could you share your inspiration for this song?

Well I didn't plan on writing that song at all. I kept having dreams about Rick, dreams about us loading our gear for a show, recording and out at public events. In the dreams I was the only one who knew he wasn't supposed to be there but couldn't say anything for fear he would go away. It was always positive and always filled with happiness. I picked up an acoustic and wrote the music quickly one night and the lyrics just poured out of me. It's meant to be a message to anyone who's lost someone, that they're always with us in spirit and sometimes you can visit them in your dreams. After I finished the song - it is actually a demo on the album that Paul cleaned up - the dreams stopped. I think Rick wanted me to know it's okay to move on.

The music business has changed drastically from when you started out in the early eighties. What to Dennis Churchill Dries constitutes success?

I've already succeeded. This album was a musical therapeutic journey and there's nothing that can take that away from me. I have been through the emotional gauntlet and come through the other side a complete person with my wits, family, sanity and heart intact. The lyrics to the songs are quite telling. I lost an important part of my life but found myself along the way. There aren't any sales figures that can match that. If I can release 'Unbroken' and 'Pieces' on the same album and get away with it, I'm happy! I believe if the music is solid nothing else really matters. With the music biz in the shape it's in, I can't really worry about that. It doesn't matter if Melodic Rock genre sites and radio stations pick up on it or the Country Rock genre decides to start playing 'Home', 'Pictures', or 'So Good To See You'… if the music is appreciated, that's what matters.

Now that you have taken the first steps back into a business that you effectively haven't been part of in almost 20 years, have you been bitten by the bug yet, or are you wondering "How the hell have I ended up doing this again?"

Ha! Again with the good questions. I had a great time working on this with Sabu, and have in fact started working on more material. Who knows what will happen next?!

As with any performer these days the always tricky question of live shows is levelled at performers. Is DCD pretty much just a studio project for the foreseeable future?

I don't see myself going out on tour anytime soon but would consider some festival shows or one-offs. I'd have to get a band together… geez, another challenge! This project was one of the most amazing, difficult, enlightening, emotional, soul searching, important things I've ever been through in my life. After being a part of two bands that generated a lot of attention internationally, I present to the world a collection of songs that I can say without a doubt, came from my heart. No record company telling me what to do, no manager steering my creativity. Just me, myself, and "I". I didn't make this album to be a rock star. I didn't make it to get rich. I made it to survive. I am, as it turns out, 'Unbroken'…

BUMBLEFOOT

Ron Thal (widely recognised simply as Bumblefoot), is as entertaining and unconventional as he is talented. Although active in the music scene in and around New York City for years, being featured in the Spotlight column of Guitar Player magazine helped pave the way for 'The Adventures Of Bumblefoot,' an instrumental album released on Shrapnel Records twenty years ago. Since then, Ron has maintained constant, forward momentum that includes a solo discography amounting to 10 albums and EP's (not to mention his one-song-a-month project which could be considered an album in itself). If that were not enough, he is a current guitarist in the legendary Guns N' Roses and as of late, a member of the "supergroup," Art Of Anarchy. Brent Rusche had the opportunity to speak with Ron his latest solo release entitled 'Little Brother Is Watching' and his latest outing, Art Of Anarchy (AoA). Photo by Catherine Asanov.

'Little Brother Is Watching' was completed by 102 persons... you multitasking on guitars, bass and lead vocals, drummer Dennis Leeflang and a 100 strong chorus who are featured on the songs 'Clots,' 'Little Brother Is Watching,' 'Living The Dream,' and 'Never Again.' Was it difficult from a logistical perspective to execute and where did you amass such a team of willing participants?

It wasn't difficult at all. I secured a venue, scheduled a date, made an announcement with all the details and awarded the first 100 people to respond. People would then email me their contact information so we could verify their credentials at the door. I had a microphone, laptop and digital audio interface ready to record. When everyone arrived and settled in, I would play one of the songs and would discuss it a bit. I would then show the parts to sing, hit record and we would all start singing the parts together… over and over. The next day, I went into the studio and mixed the group vocals into the songs. I enjoy it when people sing along at shows. It is that sense of togetherness that I wanted to capture on the album. I am grateful to everyone that showed up and was part of the album.

The first single, ''Til The Dust Is Gone' features a rather lavish music video shot atop the famed Diamond Building in Los Angeles. Did the label invest in the band or do the costs for making the video have to be recouped by the band in the form of record sales and touring?

The video was self-funded, as was the video for Bumblefoot's 'Little Brother Is Watching.' Even though we live in a time where music videos are viewed more often streaming on a smartphone than broadcast on a TV network, I think it's still worth the effort. After all, this is your art…your statement. This is what you're leaving the world with after you're gone. For that, I think that it's worth the effort and investment.

Your vocals have gotten better with each subsequent release and sounding stronger and more confident than ever. Did singing always come naturally or something that you've had to consciously work to develop?

Thank you very much. I have always sang, and was singing lead in my band (sometimes other bands) since age 16. By age 19 I developed some bad vocal habits and went for a year-and-a-half of vocal lessons which made a huge difference. I do love collaborating and working with other singers. I did some great stuff with Tony Harnell (TNT, Westworld, Skid Row) which resulted in the acoustic album, 'Tony Harnell and The Wildflowers' with a video for 'Burning Daylight.' There's also been a lot of instances with artists that I produce where I am also writing and playing the music.

Considering your commitments to Guns N' Roses, how long did it take for you to write and record the material that ultimately became 'LBIW?'

Writing, recording and releasing music is something I need to do in order to feel alive. I was able to do a song-a-month digital-release series back in 2011. I put a lot of effort into each of those which included alternative mixes, backing tracks, stems for remixes and even guitar transcriptions. It was a good avenue to take, but I've always been itching to do more albums. In the '90s and early 2000s, I would release an album every year or two. I was also touring, teaching (Professor Bumblefoot at SUNY Purchase College in NY), producing bands and writing music for TV, film and video games. However, once touring took a bigger chunk of my time, a lot of things had to be put aside. After finishing the Guitar Gods tour with Yngwie Malmsteen last summer, I locked myself in the studio and made 'LBIW' my priority for the rest of the year. I already had a few songs half-finished, but really started writing at the end of December 2013 and continued writing all the way through July 2014. It was the first time I was able to continuously write on the road.

How did Art Of Anarchy come to fruition and ultimately secure a deal with Another Century/Century Media?

The band started in 2011 by two brothers, guitarist Jon and drummer Vince Votta. They're long-time friends and I've been producing their bands for the past 18 years. They wanted to start their own label and imagined its first release to be a "supergroup" of sorts. We hit the studio and started tracking songs, patiently working whenever I was off the road. I added my guitar parts, John Moyer from Disturbed then joined the project and performed bass on the album. The final ingredient was Scott Weiland writing and recording his vocals. As we sought out different possibilities for distribution, our manager connected us with Century Media and it has been a great match. They've weathered every storm and believe not only in the album but a future for the band as well.

Will AoA take to the road and backfill for Scott if necessary?

The first step is getting the album released, then we'll have a better idea of what steps come next. My apologies for the evasive answer, but honestly, the next moves aren't yet confirmed. However, we're definitely ready to embrace whatever comes and move forward with it. Whatever the world wants, I hope we can deliver.

Words: Steve Swift. Photo: Axel Jussiet

Actors have often been denigrated as flaky, somehow not worthwhile, fripperies who are a little silly, getting paid badly because it's their vocation, they don't do it for the money...musical theatre has an even worse view among some, frothy, not really worthwhile, the actors who work in it derided as 'West End Wendies'. Virgin Steele, starting out as a Metal band, soon began to add theatrical elements to their sound, culminating with their Rock Opera 'The House Of Atreus 1&2'; challenging music with a very heavy basis that often is not given the plaudits it deserves. Now VS are back with perhaps their darkest album yet, 'Nocturnes Of Hellfire And Damnation'...

'Nocturnes Of Hellfire And Damnation' is a record packed with reflections on mortality and the connections which make us what we are. It's challenging music and main-man David DeFeis is not about to apologise for that.

"We try," he laughs at the hackneyed question. "Thanks for noticing! We do our own thing, we make the music we want to hear and get off to. I have that obsession, that drive to create new for myself, entertain and express myself. I've never given much thought to what's gonna be successful or what people expect from me. I can't live like that, it's not my lifestyle. If they don't wanna buy the record, if they don't like the record, okay, they don't have to; I mainly make the stuff to keep my sanity, to keep grounded, to keep functioning on the planet; I might be untethered and somewhat dangerous if I didn't."

There is not a concept as such, but all these songs have as their basis humanity and our place in it.

"I tried to keep it raw, a live sounding record, like 'Who Live At Leeds', keep all the rough edges in, let it all hang out and I think it worked. I could have come out with another collection, I've already written what will be the next two albums," he reveals. "One of them is a really big Greek tragedy, over the top drama thing and another is more autumnal. I thought let's do something connected like 'Noble Savage' (1986) was, a theme but not a story per se. All the songs have their foundation in what goes on around here in my daily and nightly life, based on my relationships, my observations. I'm thrilled you're enjoying it."

The album really is an entertaining listen, full of twists and turns, even waltz time, doing what challenging music should, making you question yourself as you're pumping your fist and air guitaring furiously.

"It's what all music or art should do. Take you to a place you didn't expect. Everyone who hears the songs will come away with a different interpretation of what they're about, I write in a universal fashion so you can see yourself in there. We wanted to do something live sounding and bring in all the different aspects of what Virgin Steele has been, a new strain which I call the Gothic Blues side and that's starting to appear on songs like 'Delirium'; the pure Blues. It's always been there but now we've given more vent to it; there'll be more of that on the records ahead, the bonus tracks of the reissues."

And the theatricality of life, the 19th century poets, myth and legend are as much of his writing as a pummelling beat and scything riff. He couldn't change it even if he wanted to.

"It's pretty much the way I felt; the writing is largely coming from my pen. It was a period in the 90s when I went back to university, studying composition of music in greater detail…how can I combine this with the poetics that I like, 19th century, Lord Byron, Shelly, Chopin, with my upbringing, the theatre, the Greek side. Now I'm giving a freer vent to more sides of my nature. I never think in terms of 'oh I have to do this, it's Heavy Metal' or 'I can't do this'. Metal is more than just turning up your amp, it's a whole other vocabulary that comes in and I'm steeped in that, it's what I was raised on. See who wants to come along on the ride with me and if they don't get the work right away; people don't always have the tools to handle a work, happened to me before with certain records, I wasn't ready for them, just a natural thing that happens. Bands want to connect with their fans every time and not lose them; we've never been afraid of losing anybody because we'll regroup them later on. We never set out to be the most popular people on the planet; I wanted to create a way of life - that's what I'm about. I live simply, I just need my friends, nice wine, my woman, good music - I'm done!'

And that view goes with a willingness to work to support his musical passion. This is key; those bands and musicians who make the shift and take that step tend to show a fearlessness that other bands lack; they seem to care less about how much they sell, they can always do something else and come back to it.

'I don't mind working hard. I wouldn't mind if we became the biggest band on the planet! But that's not the driving force, what drives me is what I want to explore musically, saying what I want to say. (Writing time is) largely the autumn and the winter, I tend to be more of moody person and I like things of a melancholic nature. There are things on this record that are specific to my life, I'm writing about things that are interesting to me; voodoo, darkness, magic. 'Glamour' on the album, that was about a man with a relationship, talking about my deep lifelong relationship to music, where it's taken me, what it's taken away from me. On this record I wanted to push the envelope even more as to what's happening new; a song like 'Persephone', that's about the relationship of Persephone to Hades and the seasons. There's a lot of negativity on the record but positivity too, 'Demolition Queen'… very pro female. I like powerful women; it's a celebration of sexuality, sensuality, lust.'

And apart from Savatage, Virgin Steele might be the only band who add the narrative, the musical theatre flamboyance in the Metal genre. They might even be a bit special.

'You're making my day here!' he chuckles. "We've never really fit comfortably into boxes because there's a lot more in what we do, I call it Barbaric Romantic music and under that flag we can do what we want to do. That's the commerce side of it which I don't really care about at all, it's not my thing; I've lived my life, I've made a living from music but I've also worked in a factory cutting up steel, I've cleaned toilets and I was never afraid to work - if it all falls apart, go back and do it again. I'd like to be remembered; pretentious, but why else are you put on the planet? Reach for the stars, you might hit the moon. I'd like to be remembered in 300 years as a composer with some sort of substance. Take your lumps, that's what life is.'

David DeFeis does know what life is. He exhibits a fearlessness that is hard to deny, he loves the music he produces and cannot suppress it. This is in his blood, that purity of his work and to compromise is anathema. To ensure that doesn't happen, he is willing to get his hands dirty and work tirelessly. And the new Virgin Steele album is a massive, Metallic monster, such a journey that you can stay with it for weeks and find new places to visit. A singular band with a singular driving force.

STEVE VAI

Following the release of his latest album 'The Story Of Light' in 2012, guitar guru Steve Vai embarked on a two-year long tour that took him to all corners of the world. To captivate the essence of that magnificent tour with his enduring band members Dave Weiner on guitar, Jeremy Colson on drums and Philip Bynoe on bass, together with harpist Deborah Henson-Conant, the show in his hometown of Los Angeles was filmed for a DVD. 'Stillness in Motion – Vai Live in L.A.' sees the light of day now and not only contains the live show but also an extensive and interesting tour diary, making the whole package even more entertaining and inspiring. Eager to have a conversation about this release with this genius of the six strings, Mónica Castedo-López dialled his number to find out more.

Congratulations on this masterpiece of a release. Tell us about it.

The show in L.A. was going to be broadcast by an American TV channel with the condition that I would retain all of the footage, so it was wonderful because I got this beautiful nine-camera shoot and a good recording. Hence it was a good opportunity to use what was given to me. Editing the DVD, the show portion, was relatively easy but then when I was finished with it, I had this idea. I always try a little something more, a little something different to any project I do. It's a fun kind of a challenge to push myself to try to do something unique, so I asked myself: "What are you going to do for this?" And an idea came to me; because it was such an extensive tour, we went around the world twice and went to some cities that I was told no American artist had been to yet. How interesting it would be to create a live tour diary where you get to see snippets, photos or some video footage from every territory we were in. I gathered all the footage that I could find from everybody on the tour that had an iPhone or a camera, and from YouTube, then I put it in chronological order and edited it and that became the bonus footage that I called 'The Space Between The Notes'. It's 3 hours 45 minutes of a tour diary and for me it's one of the achievements that I made that I thought was one of my finest. It's a peek into our personal lives on tour, especially me. Anybody who is interested in how I am or what I'm really like, you get a really close deal of that when you watch the extra footage.

You've been playing with Dave, Philip and Jeremy for a long time, especially Dave. He was a kid when he joined you the first time around. I guess the energy you get from them when you play live is crucial in them still being part of your band?

That's the crucial element to any band: the chemistry, how you communicate and create things and it's something we continuously work on. We know as a band the most important thing is how we resonate as a unit for the audience. It's very powerful when we make a conscious effort to join together and make something that is much bigger than each individual. With these guys I've also known them for so long, they're such good people, wonderful people to tour with. We have so much fun on tour. Going on tour for us is like a big vacation. The main concern when I hire somebody for the band, or even the crew, is what kind of people are they? Will they be able to enjoy being on tour? Do they like it? Although obviously they have to be able to play really well and fit the part of what I think their contribution could be.

It must be really rewarding when every night you see people in the audience mesmerised, following the music and being inspired, but is there something in particular that you find more rewarding than anything else?

There are so many rewarding moments. I love travelling, experiencing different cultures and people, the variety of people in the world, the foods, the architecture, the history - just walking around an old Eastern European city, that is wonderful for me. Being with the band is like a family, there's this energy, this feeling of completeness and that is so wonderful, but I'd probably say the most rewarding thing, and it's really hard to put it into words, is when I'm performing and I'm completely present with what I'm doing. I'm in the moment and there's this excitement in me for what I'm doing and how I'm able to give it to the audience and feel the audience in return. You feel like you're completing your purpose. Whenever I'm on stage and I'm performing for people, I feel like this is one of my main purposes in life and it's really a service-oriented attitude when I'm there for people who are interested in it, just to give them a break in life and enjoy something and feel that mesmerised feeling. I'm as mesmerised as you are when you're watching the show and that's the highlight for me, being mesmerised, being in a trance every night.

When you do that, you obviously need to choose the right songs and make them flow from beginning to end. When you choose a set-list you have to play, for instance, 'For The Love Of God' and 'Whispering A Prayer', which to me is one of the most beautiful songs ever, and it got you a Grammy. How hard was it to choose a set-list and incorporate new songs from the latest album, 'The Story

Of Light' on this tour?

Well, that is one of the most exciting parts. Before the tour, when I put the show together in my head, that's a fun and creative part. I like to create the kind of show that I would like to see if I was in the audience, that's my criteria. So the songs represent certain dynamics. Songs like you mentioned, 'For The Love Of God' and 'Whispering A Prayer', that's a particular dynamic. Then there are songs like 'Building The Church' and 'Velorum' or 'Gravity Storm'. Then there's the acoustic set where I sing a few songs and we have Jeremy come out with "the beast", which is that funny looking drum kit. So I put the songs in order that represent a dynamic that is easy to follow so that it's not always slow, it's not always fast, it's not always hard, it's not always soft. It flows. And then I figure out where I can put solos for people so they have an opportunity to shine a little bit and I get an opportunity to change my clothes. After the show is put together in my head, I challenge myself again: what are you going to do that you've never done before, you've never seen anybody do before? Then all of a sudden the idea came to me to do that 'Build Me A Song', which is where I invite people from the audience to the stage to write a song. This came to me in a flash and I knew instinctively that it was a unique idea and that it was going to work. Then you can't wait to do it.

You have your own label, Favoured Nations, but this album is not on that, it's on Sony and you have a deal with them to release your next studio album too. Why is that?

I've had Favoured Nations for about 20 years and it was a wonderful opportunity to work with creative artists. I grew on the label so that I could release my own music because all those years I was a Sony artist. The next project I'm working on is the 25th anniversary release of 'Passion And Warfare' and I approached Sony to see if I could licence the masters. They have Legacy that releases that catalogue and there's a bunch of guys, that are these really wonderful music guys, who are fans and said they really wanted that on the label. They just made me an offer that I couldn't refuse. It had to do with my entire catalogue and it was really nice to return back to Sony, especially with this new group of guys that really understand my music.

Is the re-release of 'Passion And Warfare' going to keep you busy or are you working on your next album?

No, it was one of those things where I didn't want to just release a re-mastered 25th anniversary record. I wanted to add something special so I came up with the idea, which is dangerous, to release a special package that contains a re-mastered 'Passion And Warfare' and a DVD with some footage from that period. But what is also going to be included is a new studio record of material that was written between the time of 'Flex-Able' and 'Passion And Warfare'. 'Flex-Able' was my first solo record and it's a very quirky record, very Frank Zappa-influenced. Then 'Passion And Warfare' came years later and they're such different records, it's like there's a missing link in between. And that is what I'm doing now. I'm taking some recordings that I have from that period, some of them are 30-35 years old and bringing them up to date. So my plan is to release that early next year and then do a 'Passion And Warfare' tour where we play the entire record. And then I will go back to work on a studio record.

Is there anything else you would like to add?

For guitarists, I have a camp coming up in August. It's an amazing opportunity that is called the Vai Academy. It's four days and we have 150-200 people and everyone there would jam with me at least once. This year the theme is about the guitar itself: all about the guitar, different woods for bodies and necks and how they work together, the infrastructure of the instrument, how pick-ups work etc. And it's one of the most beautiful places in America - Vail, Colorado.

IMPELLITTERI

Impellitteri has just released its tenth album, 'Venom', to worldwide critical acclaim. With a Japanese tour imminent, Rob McKenzie took the opportunity to speak to virtuoso guitarist Chris Impellitteri about the album.

You've come up with great riffs on your album, where do you get the ideas from?

It's part of the evolution of being an artist; when you mature as an artist you tend to develop new playing techniques, such as playing more complex scales, chord voicing and composition. In effect, great riffs come partially from this maturity. I also play my guitars constantly, which usually leads me to stumble upon great riffs. For example, many times I will be shredding a guitar solo and then out of thin air I inadvertently start playing a riff spontaneously as if a higher power starts to possess my soul. If the riff is magical I then develop that riff into a song! This is the part of the writing process where I believe some higher power possesses me and leads me to the music that we create in Impellitteri.

In regard to the riffs on the 'Venom' record; I set a goal for myself and the band which was as follows. I wanted the guitar riffs and solos to rival the greatest Rock guitar riffs and solos in history… Now, one must remember this was a personal goal, it's up to the listener to decide if we have succeeded with this goal.

I always thought bands like Van Halen, Ozzy, Dio, Priest, Maiden, Metallica, Whitesnake, Rainbow, etc… wrote great magical Rock riffs. So when I wrote the riffs for this new 'Venom' record I would compare my riffs to the aforementioned bands and their music to see if Impellitteri's riffs could compete with them. If my riffs rivalled these other great riffs I would then develop mine into a song! That was really the challenge and process when writing for 'Venom'.

How would you describe the Impellitteri sound?

Energetic, exciting, exhilarating and on fire! Four musicians challenging their limitations and creating a sonic storm of melody and fire.

Impellitteri is a cross between Heavy Metal and traditional Hard Rock. We also are very developed musicians and tend to use a lot of classical music influence as well. In addition, our sound comes from being influenced by bands like early Van Halen, Ozzy with Randy Rhoads, Dio, Black Sabbath, Vivaldi, etc…..

I do recognise that I get labelled as a guitar hero, or that I am often compared with many great guitarists but the band is much more than the Chris Impellitteri guitar virtuoso trip. First and foremost, Impellitteri is a band of four individuals who create music together. This is not a solo show; each member is as important as the other. The sum of the four parts is greater than any one member in this band. So we are a group and our sound proves that!

However, there will always be some people that do not understand who we are or what our sound is. In fact, some people love our band, while others hate it saying stupid comments like I'm an Yngwie clone or some ridiculous statement… clearly those people do not listen to our music thoroughly. If they listened carefully they would realise we are a Metal band composed of four musicians equally talented.

There is quite an eclectic set of tracks on the album, covering a range of Metal styles.

Yes, Impellitteri is going on 30 years as a band. We are like vampires who have lived through various times in history. Since we were part of the late 1980s, 1990s, 2000s and now 2015 - each of those decades influenced us to write in a specific manner. Each of those decades is reflective in the music that you hear by Impellitteri. However, our rule is to make each song great regardless as to which decade the influence comes from. Each Impellitteri song must stand the test of time.

For example, the song 'Venom' sounds very much like a modern day Metal or Thrash band with melodic overtones, where in contrast a song like 'We Own The Night' sounds like it came off a Dio or Whitesnake Record in 1987. Even our song titled 'Empire Of Lies' sounds like something Randy Rhoads and Ozzy would have written when they were 25 years old, although with a bad ass production and big sound!

To be honest we don't know which songs are the best, we are so close to this music as we have been practicing and playing it for three years. I won't know until three or four years from now when I listen back whether it will be "what were we thinking?" or "we were right on the money!"

There are no keyboards on 'Venom', was this a conscious decision from the start?

As a kid growing up I was such a fan of Van Halen, with the unity of a four piece band. I liked the energy they captured and wanted to do that without a load of orchestration. We have used a lot of keyboards in Impellitteri as I also like the first two Ozzy albums with songs such as 'Mr Crowley'. So, on this album it was a case of trying to make a huge sound without a ton of orchestrated parts. It was intentional to try and make the guitar speak and stand on its own. Many of the solos are first takes where I am just playing spontaneously. It turned out amazingly well! Also, even if I play fast during the solo I am always trying to complement the song and make it exciting via the solo. I always play for the song!

Rob Rock's voice is on top form on the album.

What's amazing about Rob is, how you hear him on the record is exactly what he sounds like in the studio or stage night after night, there are very few singers who can do this.

James Pulli has been in the band for a while, you are obviously well matched.

James Pulli is such a solid bassist, well versed in music theory. He knows when to play and when not, incredible tone. He's a dream bass player for a guitarist like me. He keeps everything down, so I can be over the top shredding but there also times when we are both doing it in unison

You had Jon Dette on the album instead of your regular drummer, Glen Sobel?

Jon Dette will be touring with us; Glen has been our drummer for seven years but he is committed to Alice Cooper who is on the Mötley Crüe tour. I played with Jon in Animetal USA and he was in great shape playing with Anthrax and Slayer.

Impellitteri is a strong sounding name, where does it come from?

It's not my original name, I was born Chris Hughes but I lost my parents when I was nine. My grandparents, [*who had the surname Impellitteri*], adopted me. The name was forced onto the band; the record label wanted to call us Chris Impellitteri but I said I wanted us be in a band - no solo artist stuff.

What are your closing thoughts about 'Venom'?

This record is part of the evolution of Impellitteri, When we started this album we set the goal to make the best record of our career, we thought about what records as kids affected us; for me they were Van Halen 'I', 'Blizzard Of Ozz' and 'Master of Puppets'. We wanted to make a record to push ourselves on every song and we wouldn't quit until we believed we'd created the very best.

Powerwolf are a Gothic Power Metal band from Germany that formed back in 2003. They have released five albums since then with ever increasing success, culminating in a pair of box sets last year celebrating their tenth anniversary. The band returns in 2015 with their sixth album, 'Blessed And Possessed' and Lara Kisel put some questions to Matthew Greywolf to find out more about it.

Looking back retrospectively for a couple of moments, your last album 'Preaches Of The Night' was you're most successful so far, why do you think this was?

It was the most successful one commercially. It reached high chart spots in numerous countries and even went to Number One in Germany; this was a groundbreaking success since we were the first German Metal band to reach the top of the charts in Germany. Then again, this kind of success isn't the most important thing to us. After all it's just abstract numbers and even though it makes us proud to see that we have gathered such a big fan base, sales figures are just numbers. To me personally, the biggest success of 'Preachers...' was that, in my opinion, we had outdone ourselves musically, and moreover our audiences celebrated the new songs during the shows as much as the old classics. That's the most direct and honest success.

Between that and your latest album you also released your 'History Of Heresy' box sets to celebrate your tenth anniversary. How much input did you have into the song selections and the extras, like the booklet and so on?

Our input was a hundred percent, which meant I did all the artwork myself, I wrote the essays in the books, and we also compiled the bonus material as well as the configuration like the outside box and the specials that were included. When Metal Blade told us they'd planned to do re-releases, we insisted that we had full control over them to make sure they would be value for money and something really special for our fans. In the end the projects of writing and laying out the two 'History Of Heresy' books kept me busy for more than three months of total dedication to the project. But it was worth it and maybe even slightly egotistic, since this way we have written our memories of the first ten years of "wolfish insanity" as well, ha-ha.

What factors came into your thinking when deciding on the musical direction when you began writing for your new album 'Blessed And Possessed'?

We didn't consciously decide any musical direction. Our approach has always been to simply write great new songs. We don't think about the style and we never did. The way we sound is the sound that naturally evolves when the five of us play music together. It's the way Attila Dorn sings, the way Falk Maria Schlegel plays the church organ and the way I write melodies that define our sound – not any plans about how to sound. I would even go as far as saying it's most honest if you don't consciously plan what to do; music is something intuitive to me.

Where does the new album title come from and does it have any particular meaning or reference?

There are several layers of meaning to the album title. First of all, it can refer to us as a band. We ARE blessed and possessed; blessed symbolising our visual concept as well as the epic elements in our sound, and possessed standing for the wild, the Metal element and the way we perform live. Then, as well, the title describes the ambiguity of religion as a set of rules and morals on one side – blessed – and instinct behaviour on the other side – possessed.

You mentioned in a couple of interviews that you are not interested in trying to change much in terms of style and sound; is that still the case?

As said before, we don't think about it, and this approach is most honest to me. After all I don't see the point in changing on purpose just to please some people who might expect us to. In the end it's like this; there are hundreds of bands who never find their own unique way of sounding and instead fumble from one trend to the other calling it development. But if you indeed HAVE found your very own style, journalists accuse you of not changing – where's the point in that? We simply keep it like this; we have always – and always will – play exactly what we have in mind and what we like. That's all that matters.

What was your favourite moment during the writing and recording of 'Blessed...' and on the other side of the coin what challenges did you face and overcome during the making of this release?

One of the best moments for sure was the first time we played 'Army Of The Night' in the rehearsal room. The song immediately had that live-vibe and energy that overwhelmed us. A difficulty we had to overcome was to meet the expectations outside the rehearsal room. The bigger a band grows, the more pressure there is for sure, and even though we can divide business and being artists quite well, we would be lying if we told you we didn't feel any pressure after the great success of 'Preachers...'. It in fact took us a couple of months until we could start writing new songs without the burden of that mighty successful previous album on our shoulders. We had to really focus on what a band, no matter how successful or not, actually is – a bunch of good friends writing music together.

Once again the album has been produced by Fredrik Nordstrom; what is it about him that works so well for Powerwolf?

He's as insane and possessed by Heavy Metal as we are, ha-ha. We know each other quite well after twelve years of working together and this leaves a lot of space for experiments. Many people think it might get boring or uninspired to work with the same producer again and again, but on the contrary, we don't have to waste any time talking about general characteristics of our sound, as the vision is clear to everybody; instead we can focus on elaborating details like, for example, the percussions of the choir arrangement. For us those details are essential.

The limited first run of the album is coming out with a second disc of ten cover versions of Black Sabbath, Ozzy Osbourne and Judas Priest songs. What made you decide to do that?

It was a fun project we had in mind for years. The idea was not to cover ten Heavy Metal hits, but instead cover our personal favourites or songs that had inspired us in our early years. For example Iron Maiden's 'The Evil That Men Do' was a song that changed my life when I was an eleven year old kid starting to play guitar – it was both an honour and fun to record a Powerwolf style version of that song.

Are you looking forward to coming back to the U.K. in September as part of your European tour?

Definitely, I remember our last London show as a quite intense yet small and sweaty club show. Despite the fact that we couldn't set up even a small part of our stage design, it was one of the best of the whole tour. There was a lot of passion and energy. We can't wait to return, this time in a slightly bigger venue. It's going to be a great Metal mass for sure!

Symphony X

New Jersey Symphonic Metal band Symphony X are back with their brand new album 'Underworld'. A dark tale of Heaven and Hell and the emotions of love and loss. Ian Johnson talks with the band's guitarist Michael Romeo about album covers, what it takes to make a record these days and how the album itself is influenced by heady themes and ideas taken from the writings of Dante and Greek Classical Mythology.

The new album is based a little on 'Dante's Inferno' and 'Orpheus In The Underworld'. It deals with love and loss, darkness and light, which are deep subjects for any album. So what comes first for you as the main songwriter; the story or the music?

On this one and on the last couple we'd sit down and look at what we could do as a band for the albums. We don't write songs without structure and even if it isn't a concept album we like to have a theme to build the album around. On this one, 'Underworld', it just happened to be Dante and Orpheus that inspired us. It was quite early on that we looked at those two stories and I especially liked the darkness in those tales; I think that darkness suits our music. So they were our initial starting points but we also wanted to explore the emotion contained in those stories, Orpheus losing his wife and Dante walking through Hell and witnessing all those tortured souls. So out of the gate those stories helped with the lyrics, and then a big part of the music was that we wanted it to be a whole album, not just a bunch of songs put together. We wanted the record to flow, to be a true listening experience like you used to have with albums back in the day. Every song for us had to be a strong one, a song that fitted neatly together with the others to form a cohesive unit. Even though there a lot of different song styles on the album, we tried our hardest to make sure that they all fitted together perfectly.

I read that you used some of Dante's ideas about the number three and it's multiples throughout the album, hiding them in different songs.

We did. I'm very familiar with Dante's work, especially 'The Inferno' and also his ideas about the number three and I thought it would be a nice thing to use some of those ideas in our songs. Dante's 'Divine Comedy' is in three parts, there are three lines to each verse, there's nine circles to Hell. And so on. I found that very interesting and we thought it would be fun to use some of those ideas during the album. So there's time signatures that flit between three and six and three bars, then verses with twenty seven words in them and lots of other things that are there for the band more than the fans really. It was just a fun thing to try out and hopefully it worked.

Also some bands ask an artist to do their cover art and it has little to do with the album, it's just a nice picture. You instead asked illustrator Warren Flanagan (Watchmen, The Incredible Hulk, etc.) to come up with something that uses elements from the album. He used the masks from your earlier album covers but now there are nine representing Dante's circles of Hell and during his own research he came up with symbols that represent those levels of Hell to accompany each mask.

He did and we love what he came up with. It helps tie in the whole album feel to 'Underworld' because you see the cover first, then the songs tie in with that and maybe you'll go on from listening to the album and find out about Dante or Orpheus for yourself. I think good bands should always try to give their fans a full album experience if they can and Warren's cover isn't just a random thing thrown in at the last minute, it all ties in with what we've done on the record.

How long does it take you from the initial idea to the finished album? With such an elaborate story/theme it won't be a fast process I imagine?

This time it was Heaven and Hell, other times it's been 'The Odyssey' or the Gods of Olympus. Then it's sitting down and working out how to put that together as an album. Funny thing is, as we were making this album, people were telling us Metal/Rock whatever you

want to call it, was dead or dying and these days it is tough to make a buck playing this kind of music, but we knew and we've always known that we have something as a band. Those negative comments were just pure motivation to us to prove that you can still make great albums, albums that people want to hear. We knew we had to make an album that had strong themes and doing that takes time. It takes time to come up with the right guitar riffs, vocal melodies and lyrics but when it all comes together and works you know you haven't wasted your time. Always in my mind I have the idea that I have to write the strongest song, strongest riff, best lyric for the album that I can because if I don't, I'm not just cheating myself and the band, but the fans as well. And I'm so proud of what we've achieved on 'Underworld'

You seem to have brought keyboard player Michael Pinnella to the fore for 'Underworld'. Is this because the songs demanded more keyboards than ever before?

(Laughs) He'll be happy to hear. I think that's because this record isn't as heavy as we were on say 'Iconoclast' or 'Paradise Lost'. I mean the heavy riffs are still there when needed and there are lots of heavy songs on 'Underworld' but there's also a lot of lighter passages this time and Pinnella's keyboards really make those passages come to life. Take 'Swansong' which is all Pinella, his melodies etc., that song needed him but on others the guitar is king, it just depends on what the song needs the most to make it work. The cool thing, I think, for us on this record was that everyone seemed to have an energy and passion for the album that was bigger than ever before. We all knew instinctively what was right and wrong for the CD and pulling together I think we've made one of our best albums to date.

Does having Russell Allen as the band's singer make it easier for you to write songs because he could probably sing almost anything and make it sound good?

(Laughs) I think what it is, is trust. We've been at this for a long time now and we all trust each other to deliver for our albums, so I know that when Russell sings he's going to give 110%. He knows I'm going to do likewise and that goes for all the other guys in the band as well. Because of this trust we know when we get together that we can bring this music of ours to life - which is why I think what we do as Symphony X works and works well.

What do you think is the reason behind the band's longevity, how have you survived virtually intact since you started out in 1994?

My God, good question! Well, we all know that it's a hard business to work in, with lots of pitfalls and other problems that bite you on the ass. We also have a mutual respect for each other within the band and not only that, we're friends. Of course we argue and fight sometimes but it's that respect for each other, not just as fellow musicians but as people, that is I think one of the main reasons why we've stuck together for so long. At the end of the day, when we're all together in the recording studio and we've just put something down and we all get goose bumps about the same thing, then we know it's that respect and love of what we do as a band, the music we create, that has kept us together for over twenty years. We're five individuals with strong personalities but that respect and musical drive is what's kept us going as a band, which is I think a really cool thing.

Does having outside projects also help you as a band? When you're away doing solo albums or guest slots and you finally return to Symphony X, are your batteries recharged?

Definitely there's an element of that but also it's hard just having one band as your main source of income these days. At the end of the day we all have families and bills to pay and if we only did Symphony X 24/7 we wouldn't be able to keep working as a band. The other projects help with that and it also gives us an outlet as musicians, so we can do other things making different kinds of music, keeping ourselves busy. I'm looking into getting involved with TV, DVD and Movie soundtracks, I've always been interested in that type of stuff and we've always said to each other that as long as it doesn't interfere with the band then just go for it.

Talking of DVD's isn't it about time that Symphony X recorded a full blown DVD for the fans?

Yes, definitely. Hopefully on our upcoming US tour which starts in September we'll get around to doing that. We had a meeting just the other day about this and we want to do it but we also want to make the DVD something different, something special for the fans. So when we're out on tour later this year, I think we need to seriously consider getting our live show on to film. We've always wanted to do it and now I don't think there's any excuse not to.

Back to the new album Michael, my personal favourite is 'Swansong'. Do you have one from the album and what is your all time favourite SX song?

'Swansong', really? That's interesting. I like that one a lot too. Personally though I can't choose, I'm too close at the moment and each day I have a different song I like more than the others. Today it's 'Nevermore' yesterday it was 'Kiss Of Fire' tomorrow it could be 'In My Darkest Hour' or 'Without You' because it's a different kind of song for us. I think this is one of our best ever albums it's really just too hard for me to pick. My favourite ever Symphony X song is… wow! That's a hard question, I'd probably say that 'The Odyssey' is the one I'd choose because of the way it flows together, the way the story works with the music, it's probably the most complete song we've ever done as a band.

Finally Michael did you ever think you'd still be making music for a living when you started out back in the early 90s?

I hoped I would, I love doing this, I really do. Growing up, it was a little hard as my parents didn't want me doing this at all. They are both involved heavily with the US school system, so my folks and I didn't see eye to eye about my wanting to be a long haired Metal musician. So it was tough but it gave me that "I'm going to show you all" attitude, that "I'm going to try my damnedest to make it" mind set, which in the end worked out for me. Wonderfully my folks are cool about it now and are so proud of what I've achieved. When you're young, you dream of what you would like to do and I think we've been very lucky to have been able to do what we have with this band.

JOE SATRIANI

Interview by Phil Ashcroft. Photo by Larry Dimarzio

Over the last thirty years guitarist Joe Satriani has gone from being the guitar teacher to Steve Vai, Kirk Hammett and countless others, to being the biggest selling guitar instrumentalist of all time. It's not only his skill on the instrument, it's his knack of writing accessible melodies that cover a myriad of styles, as demonstrated by eclectic new album, the curiously named 'Shockwave Supernova'.

"The title is the name of an alter-ego I've created for myself," says Joe surprisingly. "It's a funny thing that I thought about, it was getting to the end of the tour and I was thinking about how playing with my teeth was such a bad idea, but I'd been doing it quite a bit on the tour, and I thought "What's making me do that?" Well, one crazy thought led to another and I thought it must be some alter-ego I'd created when I go on stage who's more of an extrovert than my true personality. So I thought, what would we call him, this extrovert who goes out and plays with his teeth? I thought of the silliest name possible, which was Shockwave Supernova, like he thinks he's a superstar and he's exploding all the time in front of everybody. So if I had a record that was based on the career of this alter-ego I could bring in all the different kinds of music that runs through this person's mind, and force him to morph, to grow into a more mature character. To say to him 'You can't play with your teeth anymore, you have to be better!' So the album chronicles all the different facets of this personality, and the last song on the album 'Goodbye Supernova', is about the struggle to reinvent yourself."

The most remarkable thing about Joe's career is that all his albums have a distinct personality. It can't be easy to keep writing songs that don't sound like something he's already done before.

"It's not difficult for me to write different kinds of music, I'm always writing quite a large variety of music anyway. I've been blessed with being prolific and always being excited about writing music. Not all of it's good. You write a song, you love it, and then the next day you listen to it and you think it's terrible and are thankful that no-one heard it. Recording a record, now that's the challenge! Once you've done that you're open to international scrutiny. I'm used to the fact that people will throw criticism at you with alarming regularity, so you just kind of get used to that. It's a challenge to walk into a studio with a piece of music that has twelve notes to work with and make it sound like you've progressed into some new area. But that's also the fun part, that's part of the artistic challenge."

Although he gets branded a 'shredder' that's not really Joe's style at all, but there are brief flurries that must be hard to reproduce in the live show every night, the ridiculous arpeggio on the new album's aptly titled 'Crazy Joey' being one of them. He laughs at the mention of the track.

"Since I finished the album I've been practising that," he says earnestly. "I'm getting better and better at it and I'm beginning to get more relaxed at it, but you're right. Once I got over the thrill of recording it, I listened to it back and thought 'Oh, you've done it again. You're going to find yourself on a morning television show and they're going to ask you to play that!' The excitement is in the challenge to create a new form of instrumental guitar song, that's what I like about it. I'm still so impressed with the legacy of all those guitar players before me, like Les Paul and The Shadows, they put stuff down that was just ground-breaking, so I feel compelled to try to move that form forward."

Joe is also enthusiastic about his live band from the 2013 'Unstoppable Momentum' tour; drummer Marco Minneman, bassist Bryan Beller and keyboardist Mike Keneally, who all play on the lions share of the new album.

"They're all incredible talents," says the guitarist proudly. "Their versatility and enthusiasm to try new things has been invaluable. On this album I also have Vinnie Colaiuta on drums as well as Marco, Chris Chaney, myself and Bobby Vega on bass as well as Bryan Beller, while Mike Keneally is doing just about all the keyboards, so it's an album that's sprawling in stylistic avenues, but also in the way that the musicians play differently for each song. What I was most excited about was bringing different types of songs every day and saying to them 'Let's try this in a different style. The demo might be Heavy Metal, let's try it in a quirky style. The demo might be acoustic, let's make it electronic.' You mentioned 'Crazy Joey', I originally thought I was writing for Chad Smith for it to be a Chickenfoot song, but as I got further into it I thought it could be more of an instrumental as Sammy Hagar would have a hard time trying to figure out where to sing. So I changed it and ended up using demo material by a drummer that goes by the name of Brain. I got excited about it when I realised that it could go verse, ensemble, chorus, verse, ensemble, chorus, bridge and then end, and when I showed it to Vinnie Colaiuta he did such a number on it and he really made it work. It was really interesting the transition of it. So I guess sometimes I'm really thinking of a specific drummer, and then sometimes I just change my mind," he laughs mischievously.

Most of Satriani's work has been co-produced by himself with either Mike Fraser or John Cuniberti, this time reverting back to Cuniberti after two albums in a row with Fraser.

"John and I had spent quite a lot of time together in the last few years, mainly working on the Chrome Dome, which was the remastering of my entire catalogue. I also did a lot of records with both John and Mike Fraser together, where one would do the recording and one would do the mixing, so it's like a family of friends. I do feel that sometimes Mike might be more partial to the material I'm writing, but in this case I was thinking that this record was going to be so stylistically all over the place and it was beginning to sound like that 'Surfing With The Alien', 'Flying In A Blue Dream' period for the variety, so naturally I was thinking of going back to John. I love producing, it's that extra tool that you've got, it's that extra foot-pedal you bring out to make your guitar sound great. The actual production of a record, even though it's an enormous amount of work and extremely expensive, it's also very exciting. It's kinda what people hear first and you have to be sure that the production doesn't get in the way of the musical message, the heart and soul of the music and the musical performances. I've worked with Glyn Johns and Andy Johns, along with Mike and John, and they're all so completely different, but all so talented in recognising where the energy is going in a session, and where the real great performances are. That's why I like working with a co-producer, because when you've got the guitar strapped around your back and you're just lost in the music, you can't produce yourself. You really need someone right next to you to tell you to do it again, or not to do it again because it's perfect."

This far into his career Joe seems to have played the music industry game in a clever way that's avoided him becoming burnt out, it obviously helps that he doesn't particularly dislike any of the main steps involved. He pauses wistfully.

"You know, when I'm starting in the studio I can't wait to get into it, and when I'm finishing an album I can't wait to get out. Then once I start on a tour I realise it's the best place in the world to be, and by the last show I realise that if I don't stop I'm going to drop dead, it's an endless cycle. To me it's a three-spoke wheel, there's nothing like being left alone at home to write and no-one bugging you, no interviews, no cameras, it's just you writing songs. Then eventually you get tired of that and you want to get into the studio to hear what those songs will sound like when they've blossomed and you've brought in other people to join the party. Then you work yourself to the bone and reach a point where you're done, and if you work on it any more you'll go mad, you just

want to drive around in the tour bus and run around on stage and act like an idiot. That's the third phase that seems so necessary, but when you come to the end of it you realise that you want to go climb back into your cave and write some different songs."

The Rock 'N Roll Fantasy Camp phenomenon has opened up new avenues for musicians to interact with their idols, learning up close in a way that could never have happened in previous generations. Joe himself has his own G4 camp, inviting fellow guitarists and other musicians to help spread the music. His second annual G4 get-together is next month in California.

"Oh yeah, it's going to be interesting this time," he enthuses. "I've got Tosin Abasi of Animals As Leaders and Guthrie Govan and his band The Aristocrats, both incredible guitarists who do things I could never do, so it's kind of a perverse thrill for me. Ever since I started the G3 concert series, which was basically based on scaring the hell out of myself by standing next to two guitar players who could play me under the table, I found that it was so thrilling to go out on stage and say 'I think I'm pretty good but these guys are actually better, and I'm going to let them show you that!'" he laughs. "It's very exciting because you learn something from it and it's a very interesting thrill, and when we turn those G3 concerts into these G4 clinics, over the course of a few days in a camp-like setting, you get to show all these young musicians that although some people have different talents and some people excel in different areas, it's still about trying to get the music that's inside of you, out through your instrument. We can show you how we did it, and the more variety we can show to the G4 campers, the better, and this year it'll be just fantastic. I can't wait to get up there with Guthrie and Tosin, and of course Mike Keneally, who's been so generous to come and join us, he's our number four. I think I've played with Mike more than any other guitar player, and it's funny it kind of crept up on me over the years, but at the end of the last tour I realised that I've jammed more with Mike than anyone else, more than even Steve Vai on all those G3 tours. Mike is a brilliant musician, he's a great singer, a great keyboard player and just a freaky-good guitarist, he just rounds it out in my mind. Whereas Tosin is the youngest and the most forward thinking in his approach to the guitar, and Guthrie is also younger than me and has a different approach to some of the same aspects that I've got, you bring in Mike and because he's a multi-instrumentalist and the same generation, he brings it all home with the enormity of his talent. I'm very excited about the whole thing."

Not content with writing, recording and playing music, he also has an animated sci-fi project currently in production named after his Crystal Planet album.

"It just kinda happened," laughs Joe. "A while back I put out a book of drawings, just for fun, some doodlings I'd put on straps and picks and various other things for fans. Then I sent it to Ned Evett, a friend and fellow guitarist who toured with us for a while, and he said 'I've just started getting into animating stuff for industrial clients, I'd love to put these things together for a video, maybe you could use it for your tour, send me a track from your new album.' So I sent him 'Lies And Truths' from 'Unstoppable Momentum' and he did this funny little video of these creatures flying around on some barren planet, it had no story to it but when I watched it I felt something. Then we'd have these conversations which would end with; 'Are we crazy enough to think that we could write and animate our own sci-fi series?', and we convinced ourselves that maybe we could. So basically with just our enthusiasm, some crazy drawings and some basic animation techniques, we sort of jumped into it. For over a year now Ned has been learning to be an animator, his talent at doing voices has thrown him into this incredible world of creating voices for all of these different characters. We've kinda based it as American anime serialised stories, almost like Clone Wars, the offshoot of Star Wars. It's a big story, not a one line comedy thing, but we do interject some of that irreverent attitude and we do use multimedia as the basis of it. I've done all the music here myself at my home studio. It's about this guy Satchel Walker who was born in Earth's future when Earth becomes the Crystal Planet, he was born from a future mother and a present-day father and gets transported back because of a time shredding, time travelling guitar that his father found in the past, that was placed there by the builders of the future. Their task is to struggle with the forces of evil on both Earths, the present and the future Earth. It's a crazy, wild science-fiction story that's very deep and hopefully will have a lot of legs. It's very hard to describe but we haven't really had to pitch it to anyone before. I'm sure my fans will love it, you get to hear my guitar all over it and it's way crazier than the albums," he promises.

With Joe obviously so very busy, I'm almost reluctant to mention his supergroup with Sammy Hagar, Michael Anthony and Chad Smith. Chickenfoot seem to have become the group that the members don't have time for, but Joe is honest and careful with his answer. He pauses slightly before answering.

"I just played last week with Sammy and Chad at the Acoustic For A Cure benefit, James Hetfield and Sammy put this on, it was the second annual one. The guys from Train were there and Adam Sandler got up and did a set, it was for a children's cancer charity. We *did* talk about Chickenfoot, but between Sam's current band The Circle, my touring plans, and the Chilli Peppers, I don't see a future for it yet. Everybody says 'Don't say 'never' to the press!' But at the same time I have to be a realist, I don't think anybody wants it more than I do, but at the same time I'm scratching my head and wondering how it will ever happen again," sighs Satriani deeply. We can but hope.

Joe Satriani's new album "Shockwave Supernova" is released by Sony Music/ Legacy on Friday July 24th. His 9-date UK tour with special guest Dan Patlansky kicks off at the 02 Manchester Apollo on November 1st. Further info: www.ticketline.co.uk/joe-satriani

HELLOWEEN

Very few bands can celebrate thirty years in the business and still be as relevant today as when they first started out. Helloween, pioneers of Melodic Speed Metal, are one such band. Having parted ways with guitarist/singer Kai Hansen back in 1989 after the seminal 'Keeper…' albums they lost a pivotal influence on their musical direction. The remaining members started to allow their 60s and 70s influences to come to the fore, resulting in the experimental 'Pink Bubbles Go Ape' and 'Chameleon' albums. As Michael Weikath put it, with Queen being a big influence alongside the Beatles, he felt that Helloween could follow suit in making such diverse albums. Cue a fan backlash and harsh reviews, and coupled with a significant drop in album sales, Helloween were heading towards their nadir. Their saviour came in the form of Andi Deris, plucked controversially from rising stars Pink Cream 69 to replace Michael Kiske, the new singer encouraging them to get back to what made them successful in the first place. The resulting album, 1994's 'Master Of The Rings', saved Helloween from oblivion and helped them claw back huge swathes of disenchanted fans. 2015 marks the release of their fifteenth studio album, 'My God-Given Right', which is a straight ahead balls to the wall Heavy Metal album, as good as any in their career and a continuation of the 'happy Helloween' style they reverted back to on 2013's 'Straight Out Of Hell'. To discuss this and all other aspects of Helloween's career Carl Buxton spoke with founding guitarist Michael Weikath.

Were all the guys in the band friends growing up?

No. That happened after I got to know Marcus Grosskopf via a Metal band I was playing in called Blast Furnace. We had tried Heavy Metal but we were looking for a good bass player, and that was Marcus. Then, along with Kai, Marcus and I got to know the other guys.

Were you aware of Accept at that time because their debut album came out in '78, which you said was a great year in Hamburg?

Yeah, we knew about them. I was a fan of the 'Breaker' album but the 'Restless And Wild' album for me was already something like Accept-from-Mars. It was as though it was from a different planet, kind of strange and I took weeks to digest that album. I liked only the title track and 'Princess Of The Dawn'. I thought it wasn't as strong as 'Breaker' because that was the best combination of talent from them ever – although their new album, 'Blood Of The Nations', is an extremely clever, AC/DC meets Def Leppard approach. I also saw them with Judas Priest on the 'Screaming For Vengeance' tour; that was fun.

Udo was singing in a higher register back in the 'Breaker' days and with that hard and fast approach I wondered if that was an influence when Helloween made their first record?

Yes, in a way. But it was more Judas Priest because Kai Hansen was always a huge Priest fan. Then with Metallica and Manowar you didn't really need those bands like Accept to find your way. That's what we wanted, we didn't want a mixed range or whatever, we wanted it as high as possible with screeching and screaming. Accept's 'Breaker' was like a background influence you may say.

I was living in Germany at the time Metal Hammer first came out and they were looking for new guys to be the future of German Heavy Metal, after Scorpions and Accept, that were going to follow on alongside Helloween. Were you aware at that time that there was a big groundswell of support that was looking towards Helloween as the band that were going to break out big time?

Well it felt that way, but then we also felt limited with Kai Hansen's vocals and all the guitar work he had to do at the same time. We were aiming to do something faster, more extreme, more 'classic' Accept, because Accept had left that track. However with regards to twin guitar work – because Wishbone Ash or maybe Thin Lizzy were influences – Lizzy had just had a strong effort with 'Thunder And Lightning' and we wanted to combine that to the more direct and extreme approach of Accept. Then there were bands like Manowar, Rainbow – bands that were as good as you can possibly imagine – so we were aware that we wanted to have an approach that people could never forget when they heard it. We had a record out and the idea and concept was to do a show and have people not forget your stuff – you've got to have a sound so memorable that they go out of the show still humming your melodies, making it as addictively good as you can. That was the plan.

On your last album 'Straight Out Of Hell' you only contributed two songs. I remember reading that you said that if you've got nothing worth offering the band, you're not just going to give them something if it has no meaning to it. Which songs did you write for the new album?

I did 'Battle's Won', 'Creatures In Heaven' and 'Claws'. 'Battle's Won' is the new single, and that was just a melody that I had during '7 Sinners' which didn't make it onto the album because maybe it was too 'medieval'. But there was one melody in it that I wanted to maximise, and the band added a few more tones. It reminds me most of the Eurovision TV opening theme, which is really good. So I went about finding structures that are kind of similar, but I got the melody on the guitar instead - I just wanted to bring that across in the track because I thought that it would make a great chorus if you 'optimise' it. I had the chorus and I did the rest of the stuff kind of around it with like a Michael Schenker Group feel in the riff and the verse – the verse has always kind of reminded me of 'Killers' from Iron Maiden. I thought okay, let's do the Paul Di'anno era!

It's interesting that you wrote 'Claws' because to me it's very intricate, the rhythm and melody patterns are very schizophrenic and the twin solos aren't strictly straight-forward.

It's been an idea I've had since the promo tour for 'The Time Of The Oath'. We were on a flight back to Europe from the United States, and I had that thing that went like; (sings) "to feed the claw"… I always wanted to do something with that line and I had two or three approaches that ended up kind of… boring! So I went to the extreme and said to myself, "I've got to be more set on this thing if I want it to become a reality", and that's when I made it the way it is now. It combines the half-tone riffing that Deris has used on some other tracks before; it's something a lot of Heavy Metal band do, but I wanted to do that kind of a riff, because, well, I don't usually like it when I hear it from other bands! Although what's strange is that you hear almost the same thing on the last Judas Priest record. I couldn't have known that because I'd done my track before I heard their album but it's kind of the same riff on that album – so I then adapted a change in it just because of that, which was kind of interesting in itself.

It must have been hard for Daniel to learn because the drum rhythm is very intricate.

It's very extreme. The producer, Charlie Bauerfeind, didn't like the drums. He tried to come up with simpler and easier patterns because for him as a producer it's too dense. He would go "too much information, too many events, me no like!" Over the next few days they came back to what was on the demo and I felt kind of helpless. I wondered, "how do I make this track happen?" I thought, we don't want to keep it too simple but we'd have needed like a world class super-human drummer. So Daniel said, "Okay, but you know I've got to drum it and I only have two arms and two legs, and what you programmed on your demo requires five arms and three legs. I've got to put it into some understandable form for a drummer!" So I said, "You go ahead and do that and what you play is what you play." And I think it's just amazing, it's so intense - play that to somebody in '71 and it would be like when 'Fireball' from Deep Purple came out, right?

It's not something that the average Helloween fan would predict, and that's what I find

so interesting about that song.

Yeah, I know but I think it's strange. I mean there's so much discussion or non-discussion about 'Claws'. It's like sometimes people think, oh we'd better leave that subject alone, let's not even talk about it. Then there's other people who try to analyse it and that's exactly what it was for, really, it's just an experiment. I always wanted to do something like 'Achilles Last Stand' so I can try to mimic Jimmy Page in the first solo, with that kind of attitude and even maybe a similar sound. I sometimes try something English… and then people go, "Urghhh…what's this?" [laughs]. People will like it or they won't like it, it's just something I had to do. But it lives you know, it lives, and it's too pretty to throw it away.

Was it your idea in 'Creatures In Heaven' to introduce the Hammond? It's a typical Helloween rhythm and melody but with subtle Hammond in the background.

It was meant to be something like a 'try it and see'. You have so many great samples, you have so many great Hammond organs - the electric piano. I've always been a Manfred Mann fan, so I've always wanted to try something like that, but it was a case of how to do it. The intro to that song made me think, "Okay, that's a good one to try it on" and then the rest of the track is kind of like what the mix of 'Eagle Fly Free' was; Quincy Jones' 50s orchestra with some prominent members of the orchestra coming up with their own respective solo parts. 'Creatures In Heaven' is like Ray Conniff's orchestra, with the choirs it had and the brass and strings and saxophones and stuff; like a swing Metal approach. It's kind of dubbed from Ray Conniff, a track called "S Wonderful' which is one of my favourite tracks ever. It's only available in mono because it's so old.

With regards to the solos on the album, who does what between you and Sascha Gerstner?

We both have a go at everything to see who can play each part best. Actually, I can't tell you who's playing rhythm guitars on what you hear because Charlie just let us play and he put in the guitars from the sessions that he considered the best.

Wouldn't you like to know?

Yeah, but…no. No one needs to know. Naturally you're proud of whatever you did but so many things get replaced. I have thought as to whether I played or he played, or whatever, and who's going to play it live, you know? But it doesn't matter, it's to get the production finished as quick as possible and with the best possible output. We're not interested in these personal things at all. For example, I played most of the stuff on 'Better Than Raw' except for the tracks written by Uli Kusch because he let Roland play them; Uli thought I was playing in a certain fashion and not clean enough. Then Roland came back and said "I'm never gonna play on an Uli Kusch track ever again, because he's too demanding and there's no space left for creativity or personality on the guitars!…" I said, "Yeah, okay…" [laughs]"

I'm surprised at that because they joined forces to create Masterplan, so it's quite strange that they were having these arguments.

Yeah, yeah, but it was more the frustration you know. Nowadays I just think what the heck, and I say do what you want with it. If you want to replace everything, erase it. If you see fit to use that material on the actual track, then that's also fine with me. You know, I don't really want to know who is who on the albums.

With you working in Andi's studio, the time limit surely doesn't really matter in that sense. Is it down to Nuclear Blast expecting an album from you at a certain point?

Yeah, which is fine and helps you get finished in a given timeframe. We just do what we wanna do, so we rely on Charlie, he comes up with a timetable which he puts on an on-line calendar made up of several fields. It says rhythm guitars 'Weiki', rhythm guitars 'Gerstner', bass, vocals, keyboards, choirs, choruses, solo parts and so on. He always marks his little parts when they've been done in order to keep the time. The only thing you can actually tell is who plays the solos, obviously. Therefore I'm quite sure I remember what solos I play… eh… no, sometimes I don't even remember them! But you can assume that this one sounds like a Gerstner solo and that's like a Weikath solo!

And who's doing keyboards on this record?

It's Matthias Ulmer, who's done keyboards ever since 'Gambling With The Devil' – he's from Anyone's Daughter fame; they're a German Progressive Rock band. He also plays keyboards for a few German acts that you may not have heard of, so we're very glad that he takes the time and effort to do keyboards for us as well. He's a talented superman of keyboards!

NEW RELEASES

MOXY - 40 YEARS AND STILL RIDING HIGH
ESM276 - Out 22nd May 2015
BEST OF CD + LIVE CD AND DVD
First Pressing Limited Edition of 2000 copies includes a Live DVD, triple CD boxset "jewel case"all packages are individually numbered!!!

When MOXY first exploded onto the scene in 1974 with their hit song 'Can't You See I'm a Star' they were destined to become part of the alumni of heavy hitting Canadians making a mark in the U.S.A. FAST FORWARD!!!!!!! After writing and recording new material over the years with different versions of MOXY, the time had come to celebrate the 40th anniversary of the legacy and do it right! So a new band was assembled for just such an occasion. Along with founding member Earl Johnson, an international cast of musicians were brought on board, and all materials newly recorded. Moxy are an institution and this package will be eagerly received by fans old and new.

MARK SLAUGHTER - REFLECTIONS IN A REAR VIEW MIRROR
ESM277 - Out 22nd May 2015

The band Slaughter have sold more than 5 million records worldwide, with numerous Top 30 Hits on the "Billboard Charts" with tunes such as "Fly To The Angels" and "Up All Night". In recent times Mark released a new single, "Never Givin Up", his first ever-solo track, to rave reviews on radio stations across the country. Legendary music producer Michael Wagener mixed and mastered the single and Mark played all instruments on the track with the only exception being drums that were tackled by Mark Goodin.
This tune salutes the military and all who have served; it has already received glowing reviews. "Reflections In A Rear View Mirror" is a great new album that highlights Mark's talents to maximum effect. Songs like "Away I Go", "The Real Thing" and "Don't Turn Away" are all highlights of a very strong recording. Melodic Hard Rock never sounded better.

LIONCAGE - DONE AT LAST
ESM278 - Out 19th June 2015

Lioncage are a new band from Germany who all met at a festival in Loreley that was headlined by Toto and Whitesnake. As all three band members are influenced by 80's rock such as Toto, Foreigner and Journey then it was an easy decision to form a band themselves. They had all played in cover bands previously and so the playing came naturally. The three set about writing their own material and the result sounds great.
What we have here is polished guitar driven melodic rock and keyboard drenched ballads that we all love. If you love that eighties sound then this is an album for you, the overall sound could be described as great solid melodic rock. Lioncage already have a good following which is only going to grow when this new release hits the streets…. Watch this space.

EDGE OF THE BLADE - THE GHOSTS OF HUMANS
ESM279 - Out 24th July 2015

Edge of the Blade is an exciting new band that features Alan Kelly (Shy), John Francis (After Hours) and very talented Guitarist, Keyboardist, Producer and studio Engineer Andrew Chick with his razor sharp production. They have managed to create a really professional sounding new band and their debut album "The Ghosts of Humans" is poised to set pulses racing. The band have a wide ranging influence and the music sweeps from hard hitting melodic rock to majestic melodic metal with plenty of clout. With doffs of the hat to nu melodic metal rock similar to bands such as Alter Bridge and Avenged Seven Fold with great melodies! Edge Of The Blade have given us some refreshing slants on the rock sound.

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ALBUM REVIEWS

FIREWORKS GUIDE TO WHAT'S HOT AND WHAT'S NOT...

DENNIS CHURCHILL DRIES
'I'
(AOR Heaven) **MELODIC ROCK**
Reviewed by Kieran Dargan

I was tempted to sum this album up in a single word, however I knew our Reviews Ed would have immediately insisted on something a little more descriptive. Dennis Churchill Dries should need no introduction to the readers of this magazine, as vocalist and bassist with White Sister and latterly Tattoo Rodeo. However, given the now legendary status of the Burbank foursome, it is primarily with WS that Dries is associated and, in part, 'I' continues that style of writing – powerful, melodic, anthemic driving Rock songs and subtle balladry, albeit this time standing alone and proudly under the DCD moniker.

From the sublime 'Heard It On The Radio', with its hugely sing-able chorus and subtle keyboard wizardry (which admittedly takes us back to the late 1980s) Dries has crafted, and I do not use that word lightly, an album full of marvellous songs. This album is extremely well written with an excellent production that, put simply, places 'I' head and shoulders above many contemporary releases.

Whether it's the up-tempo 'She Loves You' and 'Unbroken', the more mid-tempo but none the less marvellous title track 'I' and 'Home' or the simplistic balladry of Dries' tribute to his fallen friend, band mate and co-writer Rick Chaddock – 'So Good To See You' – this album is, in every sense of the word, sublime.

Sometimes we have a tendency to say "they don't make them like they used to", well ladies and gents "I" is made exactly like they used to! The primary concern is the songs, the musicianship, the performance and the production; when you combine it all together it works on every level.

WS fans will find a lot of familiarity here, TR fans likewise, particularly with Dries breaking out the twelve-string acoustic which is absolutely wonderful to hear, notably on 'Pictures'. It may have taken Dennis Churchill Dries a lifetime to come up with his first solo release, but it has been worth every single second of the wait.

Stunning, fantastic, sublime, incredible – throw whatever adjectives you want at it and it possibly still wouldn't do it the justice it deserves. Straight up one of the finest albums you are likely to hear in many a year – an absolute MUST HAVE!!

TEN
'ISLA DE MUERTA'
(Rocktopia) **HARD ROCK**
Reviewed by Ant Heeks

Just a mere six months after their inaugural release for the Rocktopia label, Gary Hughes and Ten returns with their twelfth studio album. The highly lauded 'Albion' was, to my mind, their finest album since the glory days of the classic 'Spellbound', yet as much as I loved 'Albion', 'Isla De Muerta' completely blows it out of the water!

Long-term fans are comprehensively catered for, while those who are yet to reconnect with Ten amidst their second coming will find '...Muerta' the perfect place to begin their re-acquaintance. '...Muerta fully explores the expansive song-writing genius of Hughes with some of his most ambitious and dynamic compositions to date. Lush, cinematic landscapes intertwine sublimely with stirring melodies and soaring choruses, most notably on the historical story-telling epics. The opening salvo of 'Buccaneers/Dead Men Tell No Tales' perfectly conjures up images of the 'Pirates Of The Caribbean' movies while 'Karnak/The Valley Of The Kings' is an Egyptian themed epic. A song with the title 'The Dragon And Saint George' could have been a real clunker, yet in the capable hands of Hughes it's an exhilarating Rock anthem with a striking chorus, certainly patriotic and with echoes of the classic 'Fear The Force'. Comparatively, the searing, riff-driven 'Angel Of Darkness' is the hardest and heaviest Ten have Rocked in many a moon.

Ten's more commercial side is expertly represented by the Melodic Rock of 'Tell Me What To Do', 'Acquiesce' and 'Intensify' while the stirring melodies and arrangement of the exquisite 'The Last Pretender' hark back to that glorious debut. The traditional Ten ballad representation comes in the guise of the dramatic, sweeping 'This Love' which is beautifully inspirational and up there with the likes of the classics 'Silent Rain' and 'You're In My Heart'.

The songs on '...Muerta are predominantly lengthier than those of its predecessor, with broader arrangements and lengthier solo opportunities for new guitarists Dann Rosingana and Steve Grocott to weave their magic which culminates to give more of a "band-feel" than some previous endeavours. Hughes' singing is better than ever and he has appeared to have grown in confidence with Ten's resurgence in popularity.

Everything you have ever loved about this band is unashamedly represented in all its glory on 'Isla De Muerta', with a masterpiece of an album to challenge the popularity of their acclaimed releases 'Spellbound' and 'The Name Of The Rose'. Ten are currently in the midst of a purple patch that shows no sign of abating, staking a claim to reaffirm their position at the pinnacle of U.K. Melodic Rock. This is a highly recommended and thoroughly essential purchase.

KAMELOT
'HAVEN'
(Napalm) **POWER METAL**
Reviewed by Dave Scott

Despite being a Power Metal band (with some Symphonicness), it will surprise many to know that I was only properly exposed to Kamelot when I reviewed the Karevik-fronted 'Silverthorn' in issue #55. I came to the album fresh (along with their new singer) and absolutely loved it so I couldn't wait to hear 'Haven' and find out how they had progressed with their newish front-man.

Kamelot are well known for including highly talented special guests and this has continued with this latest release, including two names that really extenuated my interest. Making a return and helping with continuity is Alissa White-Gluz (Arch Enemy) who appears on two tracks but it is the first timers that really grabbed my interest; Troy Donockley (Nightwish) and my absolute favourite female singer Charlotte Wessels (Delain).

Kamelot's eleventh opus opens with the bounding rhythms, luscious orchestration and scattergun guitars of 'Fallen Star' which all drives onto the first of many superb choruses. In a cracking one two punch, this is followed by 'Insomnia' which has a slightly Eastern melody in places, some hefty driven riffing and another ripping chorus with sweeping strings and a highly memorable choral line; it also has a futuristic-tinge with the keys and vocal effects.

As you approach the middle of the album there is another cracking pairing. With a mixture of galloping double drums, soaring guitars and orchestration, a succulent melody and a chorus that is as infectious as the common cold, 'Veil Of Elysium' is an awesome offering that might be one of my two favourites. Up next comes the simply stunning ballad 'Under Grey Skies' which features the unmistakeable pipes of Donockley and vocals from Karevik and Wessels (who sounds wonderful as always) that combine beautifully in a chorus that could bring tears to your eyes; when the choir joins them both, it's truly a shiver inducing moment. My favourite track... maybe?

As for the other guest, White-Gluz's first appearance comes in the furious 'Liar Liar (Wasteland Monarchy)' with its raging double drumming, glorious arrangements and quick fire chorus that just hangs around in your mind. She provides the background roars in said chorus and more trademark growls after the corking keys and guitar solos before adding clean vocals at the end. She also adds some screams, guttural roars and angelic wails to the stomping 'Revolution' which is fuelled by some equally aggressive and imposing axe work and orchestration which all combines to make up the albums heaviest offering.

On top of all these, there's also the theatrical 'My Therapy', the Eastern sounding 'End Of Innocence' and the other beautiful ballad 'Here's To The Fall' that I wish I had more space to write about. But I do have just enough left to confirm that this is another fabulous album from Kamelot and, for me, it is every bit as excellent as their last. If you are a fan of this type of music or the band itself, 'Haven' has everything you could ask for and so much more.

039 – 'AMALGAMA' *(Bitterpill)* PROGRESSIVE

039 are a five-piece Progressive Metal group from near Milan in Italy where 039 is the national telephone prefix for Italy, hence their name. 'Amalgama' is the group's debut album which they have been working on for two years.

According to the minimal blurb that accompanied the album, it is influenced by "life and death, love achieved and love which is lost, harmony and seclusion"; when roughly translated from Italian, 'Amalgama' means 'Blend' which would tie in with the lyrical content and the different musical styles.

The "Glass Man" shown on the album cover summarises the eleven songs; the individual, deprived by the delusion of his skin, showing his inner experiences, his true passions and desires but also his most secret fears.

The album begins with a short instrumental in a Hip-Hop vein (!) which leads into a heavy as hell, crunching riff for 'Dexter' that wouldn't go amiss on a Metallica track. Vocalist Bruno D'Aleo has quite a strong accent but this doesn't detract from the song and Ruggero Ascione adds an excellent guitar solo. 'What's Left' begins with the riff from Ozzy Osbourne's 'No More Tears' which is repeated several times during the song. We also have a mixture of quieter keyboards from Marco Zanibelli matched against some more monstrous melodies which end up sounding like a hybrid of Dream Theater, Vanden Plas and Kamelot!

'Out Of Time (Part 1)' is initially a slower number dominated by Zanibelli's piano before the rhythm section of bassist Daniele Carozzi and drummer Emanuele Rossi kicks in and Ascione again provides some gargantuan sounding guitar. The song actually finishes with a snippet of Pink Floyd's 'Time'; I'm not sure what Roger Waters would have to say about that!

'Away From The Sun' is a slow tune featuring piano and strings and a guest vocal from Silvia Elisa Muratori. First single 'Mother' is another heavy song very reminiscent of VP which, halfway through, slows down for a short piano interlude before Ascione blows us away with another blistering solo. 'Blood' features acoustic guitar and lush synths and, of course, has yet another heavy guitar solo which some may argue doesn't fit in with the rest of the track.

Instrumental 'Coma' builds up slowly with some organic sounding samples before the band join in and this is definitely a DT-inspired number. Title track 'Amalgama' contains some nice bass from Carozzi and excellent vocals from D'Aleo. This one contains a mixture of styles even managing to sound Psychedelic in places.

So, an interesting debut from the Italian quintet, nothing ground-breaking but fans of the Progressive Metal genre should find plenty of songs here worth discovering.

Az Chaudhry

ADRAMELCH – 'OPUS' *(Pure Prog)* PROGRESSIVE

Italian Prog band Adramelch have somehow stayed under my radar despite this being their fourth album release since 1988 (the first three being 'Irae Melanox', 'Broken History' and 'Lights From Oblivion') as I couldn't recall their name, nor did I find any reviews on the music web sites I visit regularly; on the evidence of this album that's a huge shame and an opportunity lost. Some additional research led to reviews on specialist Metal sites, suggesting either they previously produced much heavier material or their PR didn't feel the mainstream sites would be interested.

Had I unearthed this background prior to listening to the album, I'd probably have arrived at the preconception that Adramelch are yet another generic Euro Metal outfit with the inherent (and extremely dull) double bass drum fusillade; however that would have been far from the reality. If, like me, you have a fondness for the well crafted songs of Kamelot with nods in the direction of Queensrÿche and Balance Of Power then this is going to be an album you'll enjoy, no question.

Vittorio Ballerio does have an accent, a pet hate of mine, but in this case it's not intrusive and he sings wonderfully throughout. The twin guitars of Gianluca Corona and Fabio Troiani are fantastic with any number of little accentuations and fills that flesh out the arrangements delightfully and elevate the tunes from good to something rather special, whilst the rhythm section of Sarmax (bass) and Sigfrido Percich (drums) hold everything together marvellously.

'Black Mirror' has a lovely bass riff to open and then a guitar refrain that's immediately gratifying. The style of this song, as with a number on the album, is redolent of Kamelot but maybe slightly lighter in approach. The chorus is wonderful. What impresses me is that they don't swamp the tracks with instrumentation; they leave space for them to breathe.

'Long Live The Son' features a Pink Floyd-ish synth wash behind another nice guitar motif, again they demonstrate a fine ear for a chorus. Two tracks in and I'm pretty much hooked, the question is can maintain this quality throughout the twelve tracks? The answer is an emphatic yes! There's not a weak track amongst them and every one maintains interest with all the lovely subtle touches they've included.

'Pride' moves along nicely, 'Northern Lights' is acoustic guitar-based with the electrics doing lovely stuff over them. The female answering vocal is a fine touch. I wish I could précis every song but room doesn't permit. Suffice to say their ability to arrange songs is the key.

This album came to me out of the blue and I'm so glad it did; suppose I'd better check out the back catalogue.

Gary Marshall

APOCALYPTICA – 'SHADOWMAKER' *(Eleven Seven)* MODERN/ALTERNATIVE

Somewhere back in the mists of time (well, the late 1970s actually) our Lord Bon Scott proclaimed "let there be sound…" before throwing light, drums and, most pointedly, guitars into the mix as well. Yep, whichever way you slice it, the electric guitar has become synonymous with Hard Rock and Heavy Metal; a powerful phallic symbol and totem without which life would be unthinkable… or is it? If you follow the same school of thought as Finland's Apocalyptica, the answer to that one would be an emphatic "no"!

Formed in Helsinki more than twenty years ago, the band consists of three classically trained cellists (Eicca Toppinen, Paavo Lötjönen, and Perttu Kivilaakso), a drummer/double bassist Mikko Sirén and their most recent addition, American vocalist Franky Perez – although I should stress that a vocalist is nothing new to the Apocalyptica's melting pot of influences. They started out as an "alternative" Metallica tribute act – indeed, their 1996 debut 'Plays Metallica By Four Cellos' does exactly what it says on the tin – but over the years they've grown to the stage where they're making their own music and have thus far sold several million albums.

Now, revisiting my opening statement, my initial reaction was "how can it be Rock or Metal without a single note of guitar in sight?" Fearing another God-awful abortion like the Bassinvaders thing from a few years back – yes Marcus Grosskopf, thanks for that, not! – I literally had to steal myself to listen to 'Shadowmaker' (incredibly, their eighth full-length studio album), but thankfully it never got close to the same depths of banality. In fact, musically speaking those involved are all extremely gifted players; there's a darkly oppressive energy to songs like 'Cold Blood', 'Come Back Down' and 'House Of Chains' which certainly has its roots in Metallica and the ambient light and shade created throughout would be the envy of many a band.

But… and didn't you just know there was one coming… without the guitar it still smacks of gimmick and no amount of proficient musicianship is going to dissuade me from that. Sorry guys, I can appreciate the effort and abilities that went into making this record and the songs are fairly palatable (if predictable), but this does nothing for me at all. Sorry, I'll pass.

Dave Cockett

ARMORED SAINT – 'WIN HANDS DOWN' *(Metal Blade)* HEAVY METAL

Five years after 'La Raza', the Metal world welcomes the return of iconic Metal veterans Armored Saint. Remarkably, AS have stayed intact throughout their entire existence, only replacing original guitarist Dave Pritchard, who tragically succumbed to leukaemia, with Jeff Duncan. That means John Bush (vocals), Joey Vera (bass), brothers Phil Sandoval (guitars) and Gonzo Sandoval (drums) and Duncan have been representing AS for twenty-five years and have been with record label Metal Blade uninterrupted for even longer.

If one is familiar with these guys then you pretty much know what you're going to get; controlled aggressive Heavy Metal with plenty of melody, cool vibes, thought-provoking lyrics, interesting left-field passages and superb musicianship throughout.

The title track is no exception with heavy, blistering guitar, raucous, powerful vocals and a surreal Psychedelic mid-section. 'Mess' deals with environmental and cultural issues with a sitar mid-section and hugely impressive drumming from Gonzalo who drives this dark-edged song to its powerful climax. Vera's expressive bass is stamped all over 'An Exercise In Debauchery' with more blistering guitars, passionate, aggressive singing and compelling melodic riffs with Duncan and Phil Sandoval easily matching any of their previous top performances with the band.

What I especially like about AS is the comradery of friends who grew up together that have remained loyal, even after Bush's (particularly), and Vera's celebrated stints in Anthrax. That insight into the workings and writings of another band at the top of their game has seeped into the AS's armoury and Bush's singing has become more aggressive as a result (in my opinion), less so on post Anthrax offering '…Raza' but more prominent on this.

The nostalgia displayed on 'That Was Then, Way Back When' takes you on a journey with its driving, powerful essence showing everything that is great about the band. 'In An Instant' is just as powerful, again with those blistering melodic guitar solos scything through the sound like razor blades in a wind tunnel, something that belies its acoustic intro and leanings and Bush's subdued, measured vocal.

Proving how adept at ballads Metal bands are, 'Dive' shows a piano, string and acoustic accompaniment and what a rich, soulful voice Bush possesses; Phil Sandoval provides yet another beautiful melodic solo.

Negatives? There aren't any! When AS can produce a Queensrÿche-like opening to 'Muscle Memory' and showcase a wide array of stylistic musicianship from Vera's near-Funk bass, echo-effect guitar and Jazz-led syncopated rhythmic drumming to Bush's melodic-inspired chorus, then you can totally realise that Armored Saint aren't, and have never really been, your typical American Heavy Metal band.

An album that unearths different layers and gets better the more you play it!

Carl Buxton

ART OF ANARCHY – 'ART OF ANARCHY' *(Another Century)* MODERN/ALTERNATIVE

I adore Scott Weiland; love Stone Temple Pilots, his solo work, his latest album with the Wildabouts and Velvet Revolver too (in parts), so this "super-group" of sorts, with Weiland

BEAUVOIR FREE – 'AMERICAN TRASH' *(Frontiers)* HARD ROCK

U.S. Rockers Crown Of Thorns have arguably had mixed fortunes with their half-dozen or so albums since the release of their classic debut back in 1993. Guitarist Micki Free left the band a couple of years later whilst singer/guitarist Jean Beauvoir has carried the COT banner sporadically up to the present day.

Rumours of a Beauvoir/Free reunion started early in 2013 and has been eagerly awaited by lovers of that iconic self-titled record. Well, the pair have finally gotten down to recording a new album together and (thankfully) the results have been well worth the wait!

If the intention was to recapture the old COT sound then they have hit the nail on the head right from the first seconds of opener 'Angels Cry'; it's a driving Rocker with Free's raw guitar and Beauvoir's urgent vocals along with distinctive melodies and a huge chorus that is bolstered by underlying keys.

Both the straight-ahead Sleazy title-track and adrenaline-fuelled 'Shotgun To The Heart' also Rock hard yet with melody, whilst 'Whiplash' even adds a touch of AC/DC to the mix. Big riffs also adorn the menacing verses of 'Morning After' and 'Cold Dark December', both tunes turned on their heads by lighter choruses with acoustic guitars and keys. But elsewhere, things get a little Poppier without losing the dynamic qualities of these men at their best.

'Just Breathe' is a monstrous keyboard-led ballad with an emotional chorus and a great guitar solo, 'It's Never Too Late' is a full-on AOR Rocker with lush harmonies and there are hooks abound on the catchy Pop Rockers 'Never Give Up' and 'She's A KO', with the typical COT drive of 'There's No Starting Over' to bring up the rear.

The pair co-write and co-produced 'American Trash' with Free handling most of the guitars and Beauvoir playing everything else and in doing so they've done a fine job of recreating the sound and atmosphere of that COT debut. The album flows beautifully with all the elements you would want, bristling with enthusiasm, energy and power. All that's left now is for the word to spread and Beauvoir/Free to come over and play these wonderful songs live.

Phil Ashcroft

and Ron "Bumblefoot" Thal (Guns 'N' Roses) also on board , should be a knockout. It tries hard, but doesn't put you on the canvas.

It has a shiny, sleek attack courtesy of Bumblefoot's mix, which really injects energy into the cochlea; what it doesn't have is enough memorable tunes. It's odd that Weiland didn't write this music for this release because the STP sound is all over it – of course his vocal phrasing is distinctive and woozily lovely.

'Small Batch Whiskey' is as dirty as a crystal meth addict's bathroom, all sirening guitars and lilting Weiland beauty and when they hit a groove – the Roger Taylor screams in the middle of a handclapping, rising and falling 'Grand Applause' – they are undeniable.

But sometimes they conform to what we are expecting, heavy backing, Poppy chorus, wailing solo, all good, but all already there in abundance; 'Aqualung' only has this although Weiland tries his Glammy best and 'Long Ago' slowly opens to reveal Nickelback – not the best present...

Bumblefoot has a great time with his solos, warm and widdlesome when they need to be, the acoustic offer in 'Til' The Dust Is Gone' an eyebrow raiser and when Art Of Anarchy allow themselves to be a bit off kilter, they approach something fine; it is just that they get their head down and power through the Modern Rock and Metal landscape too often.

Art Of Anarchy? I used to attend Anarchist meetings and always marvelled at the organisation to get us all into a room at the same time with an agenda; this brand of anarchy would order tea and biscuits too.

Steve Swift

ARTIZAN – 'THE FURTHEST REACHES' *(Pure Steel)* HEAVY METAL

'The Furthest Reaches' is Artizan's third release and one which the bio describes as both an "epic sci-fi concept album" and a "Metal Opera"; it tells the story of an alien race returning to Earth in response to a distress signal sent into space.

Musically it's a straight ahead Metal album that is most likely to appeal to fans of classic bands like Iron Maiden, Dio and Queensrÿche. Produced by Jim Morris (Iced Earth, Crimson Glory, Jag Panzer) and featuring guest appearances from Matt Barlow (ex-Iced Earth, Ashes Of Ares) and Sabrina Cruz (Seven Kingdoms), it's regarded by the band as their "heaviest and most Progressive" work to date. It's heavy enough for most Melodic Metal fans for sure, but I remain unconvinced that it's Progressive in any meaningful sense of the word.

There are some interesting things here. The album peaks with the run of tracks that begins with the nine and half minute title track (is that what they mean by "Progressive"?), takes in the drama of the slightly sinister 'The Cleansing' and ends with 'Wardens Of The New World'; the latter utilises light and shade and the vocals of Cruz to good effect. Either side, however, much of the material fails to inspire and huffs and puffs its way along a well trodden path. Sad to say that the occasional spoken sections and narration, which should add to the engagement value of the "concept", come across as contrived and poorly delivered.

Fans may want to note that the album is available in standard and limited edition formats with different cover artworks. I've got to say that the artwork for the limited edition is more mature, more striking and more appealing.

The limited edition additionally features the bonus track 'Come Sail Away'; an interpretation of the Styx classic which, with its keyboard introduction, slow build up and strong melody actually offers something a bit different. I'm not a fan of cover versions particularly, but in this case I can't help thinking it should have been worked into the standard edition too.

Michael Anthony

ASIA – 'AXIS XXX : LIVE IN SAN FRANCISCO MMXII' *(Frontiers)* PROGRESSIVE

It'll surely not surprise you that Mae West thought too much of a good thing could be wonderful and the great Freddie Mercury was of a similar opinion. There are also those who think that to base your economy on the "super rich one percent" is foolish; after all, when you've bought five cars, how many more do you need?

And the newly revitalised (although recently over-genteel on album) Asia are in danger of approaching Rush territory – this live album and DVD comes hard on the heels of a rather patchy offering from the High Voltage Festival (the CD sounded forced, insipid and wavered not a little yet the DVD filled in the blanks and was wonderful) and we've already had live offerings in 2011 and 2012 as well.

So, what will you get for your cold, hard cash this time? Something old – those brilliant songs… something new – a robust, winning performance. This is so much better than the HV audio; John Wetton's voice, such a thing of concern then, is strong here and his bashful banter is a winner too, whilst the band, occasionally missing a stride at HV, are at their imperious best. This is theirs to lose.

That they almost do is so like Asia and perhaps why we still love them so. Opening with the timeless, pumping 'Only Time Will Tell' and segueing into a big, brash 'Wildest Dreams' with Carl Palmer's drum solo almost tickling the original, the sound is direct and the crowd in a mood to sing along. Fairly newbie 'Face On A Bridge' has more balls and bite than the original and 'Time Again', sadly minus those gorgeous harmonies, is faithful with Palmer's drumming a pleasing feature.

Of course, Asia is a barrelful of virtuosos and Steve Howe is given 'Pyramidology' and 'The Golden Mean' to showcase his acoustic virtuosity; diverting but really only that. Then Geoff Downes and Wetton arrive and have their moment, in fact several moments, as they work through 'Don't Cry' (often done sans band these days) and half of 'The Smile Has Left Your Eyes' on their own, making the return of the band half way through the latter incredibly welcome. Palmer's solo isn't too involving either, fun though it is bound to be, but a triumphal 'Here Comes The Feeling', rising and falling just as on the debut, piques the interest again, a lacklustre 'Open Your Eyes' is thankfully cancelled out by the encore of 'Sole Survivor' and 'Heat Of The Moment' with obligatory sing-along.

The DVD is visually serviceable but the mix is a roaring tiger of sound. These gents don't move around much, they don't need to prove anything after all and they are seasoned; often standing in spotlights, just delivering the music and not really covering much space. The songs are great, the delivery is exemplary, they just don't really connect, although the crowd seemed to be enjoying it; shots are mid and long, but very few close ups of their work; although Palmer's cymbal prowess in his solo is as breathtaking as always. This is perfectly enjoyable and the band still provide; it's just this is not as endearing as the HV visual portion.

On disc they can sometimes seem to sound their age, a bit tentative and settled with the wine and port, wearing splendid waistcoats. The last release 'Gravitas', in spite of hot young guitarist Sam Coulson, had that feel, one of not enough excitement. Live though, they grow, trading on their elder statesman cachet of course, but undeniably showing that they can still do it. They can, they do and they should be treasured for it.

Steve Swift

BITERS – 'ELECTRIC BLOOD' *(Earache)* HARD ROCK

When assigning an aural definition to Hard Rock in its most distilled form, AC/DC's music would be the prudent choice. Their songs are both memorable and timeless, basking in the glory of simplicity. Additionally, few others have been able to replicate that style while boasting similar consistency, longevity and success.

In 2014, Danish Rockers Razzmattazz did an exceptional job harnessing that same esthetic with their brilliant album, 'Rock 'N' Roll Hero'. Not more than a year later, a band going by the name of Biters continue this trend with their inaugural long player, 'Electric Blood'.

Biters' music is naked and its connection to the listener is immediate. Although from the U.S.A., lead singer Tuk has a voice very reminiscent of Irishman Ricky Warwick (Black Star Riders) that contributes to the band's overall "classic" sound.

'...Blood' blends their love of classic Hard Rock, 1970s (British) Glam, Pop Punk and Alternative and fuses it into something altogether unique. Complete with simple song structures, catchy hooks and a vibe that speaks of having a good time, Biters is capable of inspiring any audience to "smash your fist into the air..." ('Restless Hearts').

They even reveal an affinity of 1980's Hard Rock (think Faster Pussycat or Coney Hatch) with 'Low Lives In Hi Definition'. The production is as straightforward as the music and suits the band's performances perfectly. Effects and overdubs are kept to a bare minimum giving the album a really authentic, live feeling. Although the opener, '... Hearts', will be the first single released, in truth any one of the remaining nine tracks on offer could have easily been given that honour.

Biters certainly have a challenge on their hands when it comes time to writing and recording a follow-up, but based on the quality and consistency of 'Electric Blood', I have full confidence in their ability to deliver another winner.

Brent Rusche

AWAKE BY DESIGN – 'CARVE THE SUN' *(LMC)* SYMPHONIC METAL

There are soap operas and there are Rock bands. Rarely do these different paths cross yet, occasionally, there are some bands whose offstage antics are as interesting as the music they produce. Insert the name of the band(s) you're thinking of here and then add U.K.-based Awake By Design to that list, for the story which lies behind the evolution of 'Carve The Sun' (their second release following the 2009 debut 'Sentiment') is one which (a) is far too long to reproduce here and (b) up there with the most interesting of them.

Suffice to say, having travelled a rocky road liberally strewn with having to deal with the hardships of ever changing band members alongside multiple studio and management issues before being able to finally procure this release, the overwhelming feeling is one of relief. A feeling which you can almost sense comes across in the music that is a blend of Symphonic and Melodic Metal literally straining at the leash to be heard.

'Carve...' is all about the full sound of a two guitar and keyboard fuelled band which allows them to paint a picture of sound which shifts from the heavy to the epic with a touch of the sensitive thrown in for good measure. In fact, once the chorus to 'I' has kicked in after a minute, you can almost imagine one of the Queens of Symphonic Rock/Metal pitching in – think Within Temptation and Nightwish and you're not far off – and that's a compliment to vocalist Adrian Powell and the band with their arrangements. 'Tired Of Angels' follows in a similar vein before 'Falling On Me' shows they can do the "acoustic/overblown" combo which also evokes elements of the more ambitious Iron Maiden style of writing.

Power ballad territory gets a box ticking with 'Yesterday's Rain' – the title even sounds like it fits the genre – while 'World Of Mirrors' takes the pace down even more in a sensitive acoustic guitar/piano arrangement. They've obviously had of plenty time to think about the track sequencing which comes into play as they offer a brief respite of calm before the storm which is 'From Disgraced Land'. Opinion may be divided on closing out with the tranquillity of 'Out Of Line' rather than a more memorable bang. It may err towards the latter as the heavier material is probably where their aptitude lies.

For an album which actually had a launch event back in September 2012, it's hard to imagine the journey the music has taken to get to released and how it's been knitted together with painstaking care and precision. A fine example of persistence – just feel the love.

Mike Ainscoe

BALTIMOORE – '1.1' *(BLP)* HARD ROCK

Is 2015 going to be a year of cover/re-recorded material albums? While Whitesnake's decision to release a throwback to David Coverdale's glorious Deep Purple past is still being heavily debated, it would appear that 'The Purple Album' will certainly not be the last album of such a formula to be released this year. Another band who recently decided to release a summary of sorts – and also give a bit of a new twist to each song on it – is Sweden's Baltimoore, fronted by the musician and producer Björn Lodin.

The album entitled '1.1' is indeed Baltimoore's version 1.1 as it presents the cross-section of revamped songs from the group's catalogue – either given a new mix and mastering or re-recorded with the current line-up. The renditions of particular tracks taken from the likes of 'There's No Danger On The Roof' (1988), 'Freak' (1990) or 'Thought For Food' (1994) have been updated accordingly to the new approach and modern sound aesthetics that are more familiar with their 2014 album 'Back For More'.

It works particularly well in the case of the earliest tracks such as 'Full Speed Ahead' or 'My Blue Moon'. Now deprived of their sugary 1980's AOR vibe, they're consequently given a feistier, more contemporary edge. Enhanced by means of modern production, these classic melody lines get even more exposure within the song structure. Also the ballads have become more expressive, their emotional dimension more accentuated by a sharp, modern

sound (as in the somewhat darker rendition of 'Till The End Of Day'). Of course, there will be flavours of the original arrangements that are going to be missed by some, such as the saxophone part in 'Memories Calling' – here recreated on the guitar. The newer songs (such as 2006's 'Wellaway' for example) aren't re-worked as drastically given their initial versions were much more in tune with the current Baltimoore sound. Baltimoore version 1.1 also fits in line with Lodin's current vocal shape – more mature and raspier but also more expressive.

With all the songs on '1.1' being re-worked – in one way or another – there's more to this album than just the simple "collector's" value. Having already released a regular "Best Of" compilation back in 2001, this release allows Baltimoore to return to their classic output but this time adding a fresh insight and a new perspective. This record also somewhat traces the process of their transition from a 1980's Scandi AOR act to a more updated, "in your face" Hard Rock band. For Lodin and Baltimoore fans this release is a must, but it is also an interesting item for Melodic and Hard Rock fans in general.

Alexandra Mrozowska

BAND OF BROTHERS – 'BAND OF BROTHERS' *(Independent)* MELODIC ROCK

It's taken Swedish Pop Rockers Band Of Brothers a decade to get this point, their self-titled debut actually recorded and released. BOB have a quirky Pop Rock vibe and although there were a few songs that slipped past me, this album is a nice little surprise and definitely worth a spin; especially for those who are devoted to Scandinavian Rock music in general. They are quite quirky and although part of me wants to state this could make them a little bit of a "marmite" band, the album as a whole is far more commercial sounding than the quirky tag implies.

As I was listening to the album, I found them to be quite unique in certain aspects of their song-writing so it's hard to really compare them to other bands. But the more I thought about it, the closer I felt their quirky Pop Rock fell nicely alongside the mighty Cheap Trick. Once I had this similarity in mind, I noticed certain other similarities including the vocal style of the lead singer who, at times, really puts me in mind of CT's Robin Zander.

Therefore, if you like CT, you're sure to enjoy the Band Of Brothers given they have that same air of unconventional song-writing and performance. This album is also highly melodic so should appeal to Melodic Rock/AOR fans in general, although the nature of the album may be a little bit too out there (at times) for some traditionalists.

Lyrically these guys are indeed very quirky and offbeat and they steer clear, in the main, from a lot of the standard Melodic Rock lyrical styles I'm more used to. This also keeps in line with the CT similarity; I'd be shocked if these guys don't quote them as one of their major influences. If I'm honest, I'm not overly fond of their lyrical style myself but I do enjoy sampling something a little different even though it doesn't click with me.

'Digital Ghost' has a massive melodic chorus along with a really melodic sheen throughout that really appeals to me. For me, the most obvious "stand out" track is 'Turn Back Time' which hit me instantly with it's cool guitar licks and pretty damn awesome and memorable chorus. If you ask me, this should be the bands lead track or single.

It's not a hard album to enjoy and I'm glad these guys finally managed to get this album out there to the masses. It may not be for everyone, but I'm confident a lot of people will share my opinion that this album is a nice surprise and well worth a listen!

Paul Woodward

BLACKWELDER – 'SURVIVAL OF THE FITTEST' *(Goldencore/ZYX)* POWER METAL

With a cover depicting a hooded man offering up a magically glowing sword and the band's name written in Gothic script, it's no surprise that Blackwelder are another Power Metal band. This becomes even more apparent and obvious when you note the involvement of Ralf Scheepers, who is probably best known as the vocalist in Primal Fear (and ex-Gamma Ray) but never shy about lending his talents to other worthy projects.

Blackwelder is the brainchild of American six-slinger Andrew Szucs who I had never heard of myself, so it was a very pleasant surprise to hear just how bloody good he is – the brilliant "widdlefest" of an instrumental 'Adeturi' is testament to that. The album as a whole delivers plenty of fast and melodic tunes that pack a punch, with opener 'The Night Of The New Moon' setting the tone with a Dio meets Yngwie Malmsteen vibe that really works well.

He's certainly made a good decision in Scheepers who genuinely puts in, for me, one of his best performances here, likely inspired by some very sweet songs. There is (unsurprisingly) nothing really new here, but it's all put together so well that what could have been a run of the mill Power Metal album is transformed into a "hey – you gotta hear this" kind of thing.

Whilst this may slip under a few radars, in a just world 'Survival Of The Fittest' will place Szucs firmly on the Power Metal map; more than a Malmsteen clone but with a similar energy and stacks of talent. Couple that with powerful, melodic songs and a vocalist at the top of his game and you have an album that will not get old quickly.

Alan Holloway

BOREALIS – 'PURGATORY' *(AFM)* POWER METAL

Back in 2011, I listed Canadian Power Metal act Borealis' wonderful 'Fall From Grace' album in my Top Ten for that year. In my review in this very publication I stated that "Borealis are going to make a big impact on the Power Metal genre (that's if there is any justice in the world)". Sadly my prediction didn't come to fruition and Borealis seemed to pass many people by. Now they have returned with a stunning new release called 'Purgatory', one that I feel is even better than '…Grace'.

The obvious question I suspect you might ask is – what have Borealis come up with that has excited me so much? Well, it's an album of potent Metal songs that crackle and spark with energy and are, at times, reminiscent of the likes of Evergrey, Kamelot and Symphony X at their best. Each track though has an undeniable Borealis trademark, which goes some way to help this band standout from the crowd. That trademark goes by the name of Borealis singer/guitarist Matt Marinelli, whose forceful, captivating and muscular vocals really give this band its unique identity.

The new songs themselves are deep, dark, gloriously compelling and in their own way, extreme. I use the term "extreme" because of the intensity and aggression that can be found in each and every guitar riff, bass line and drum fill throughout this album.

Take second track 'From The Ashes' as your starting point; the guitars hit you square on and force you back into your seat and from here on in, you will begin to marvel at just how clever this band have been. They have squeezed melodies into each and every crevice they could find, on this and every song found on the album.

The assault continues with 'The Chosen One', the pounding 'Destiny', 'Darkest Sin' (a beautifully arranged ballad with some ethereal orchestration and fantastic vocals) and the classy 'Place Of Darkness' where the guitars of Marinelli and Mike Briguglio work skillfully together to create an addictive soundscape; during the latter, the whole band work together to draw out what is best in the song. These tracks, and the others that appear on the album, combine together to provide a showcase for a band with a real understanding of what is truly best in Melodic Power Metal.

For whatever reason '…Grace' didn't propel Borealis into the upper echelons of the Power Metal league tables as it should have. Its successor 'Purgatory' has everything needed to make that slight blip a thing of the past and thrust this band onwards and upwards to the bright future they richly deserve.

Ian Johnson

DESTINE – 'FOREVERMORE' *(Independent)* ROCK

Third album from Dutch Pop Rockers Destine is their first to be released via the "fan funding" Indiegogo platform. It follows the decision by the band to break away from Sony who didn't have the same vision or direction for their music that the band wanted. Clearly the decision has been totally vindicated as 'Forevermore' is far and away the bands best release to date.

'Forevermore' sees the band handling production themselves in lead singer/song-writer Robin Van Loenen's newly built home studio. Irrespective of this, the sound is far more rounded and in line with a major label effort; the band retained the services of James Paul Wisner to mix the album rather than produce it this time around.

The long break between albums and the decision to break away from a major label has elevated Van Loenen's song-writing to another level and shows that the man has true talent. One thing is clear, he's become influenced by Train and The Goo Goo Doll's most recent albums in penning the ten tracks of pure Pop Rock class contained within this album. This is still the Destine of 'Illuminate' and 'Lightspeed' but the slightly predictable Punk Pop edge has been dropped in favour of dynamic songs and sing-along chorus lines.

Album opener, the title track, has upbeat tune-smithery of the highest order and brilliant first single 'Down And Out' has the potential to be absolutely huge. Van Loenen's songs are bright, cheery and provide the perfect backdrop to hot summer days and warm summer nights. 'More', 'Rock, Paper, Scissors' and the sublime 'Demons' – probably the heaviest song that the band has recorded – deserve to be blasted out at summer barbecues throughout the land.

The harmony backing vocals throughout this album are notable, something that they manage to replicate live to much the same effect, with soaring melody lines given extra depth on the Funk arrangements of 'Anywhere You Wanna Go', 'Heart To Life' and the chiming Pop of 'Stuck In The Middle'. If there's one criticism of 'Forevermore' then it would be that it's a bit short but apart from that there's not one below par song on offer and it's a case of quality over quantity.

So, if you like bright and breezy sugar-coated Pop Rock with great songs and close knit harmony vocals, your summer just won't be complete without this – the finest album of its kind this year.

Mike Newdeck

BREAKING WAVES – 'MOVE A MOUNTAIN' *(Independent)* ROCK

'Move A Mountain' is the debut album from Phil Ireland and Adam Darwen as Breaking Waves. With Ireland handling bass plus vocals and Darwen the drums, they form a duo with such a huge sound that it's hard to believe that there's just the two of them on record. Known for some outstanding bass work in his previous outfit Exit State, Ireland shows himself to be a virtuoso performer on his chosen instrument, handing bass, rhythm and even a few lead lines in unison. Whilst '…Mountain' is firmly based in the Rock field, fronting his own outfit seems to have allowed a variety of styles with some Funk, Pop and even Jazz influences thrown into a collection of tunes that are both technically outstanding on a musically front as well as being packed full of energy and harmonies.

'Start At The End' is a fairly simplistic opening, a bass riff full of harmonies leading into an almost Rush-like Progressive rhythm. 'Everything I Worry About' sees the pair in full-power mode with a track that would have fitted easily in the Alternative Rock of ES; a hard fast riff, a bass lead break and strong vocals give it a massive sound overcoming the lack of standard guitar with ease. Next up follows a couple of more commercial sounding offerings with 'Savour' and 'Quicksand'; the "higher end" bass tones providing the melodies with great use of the harmonics of the instrument and the lower "normal" bass range providing the accents and emphasis.

Darwen's drumming is excellent throughout, with enough variation and use of cymbals to supplement and compliment the bass lines without ever becoming overbearing. He steals the performance of 'Warp The World' which is a track full of time changes and intensity with a varied and inventive series of rhythms.

There will be comparisons drawn, no doubt, with the bass and drum line-up of Royal Blood and the impact they made last year. But Ireland's ability to pick out different riffs and leads with each hand, on both five and six string basses, make Breaking Waves something different. 'Not That Easy' excels with a Funky swing to it whilst title track 'Move A Mountain' again effortlessly combines bass and lead riffs with a strong vocal performance and even a sing-along chorus. Most importantly, this is an album virtually without overdubs; those double riffs are played live and recreated onstage by the pair.

Whilst 'Move A Mountain' may not be the best album you'll hear, it works well on many levels – top musicianship, power and energy combined with a commercial accessibility. Given the unusual premise of bass and drums only, it's both an interesting and quality debut.

Ian Parry

BULLET TRAIN BLAST – 'SHAKE RATTLE RACING' *(Mighty)* HARD ROCK

Last issue I reviewed the debut album by We Are Harlot – any of you regular readers who may have taken a shine to that particular album would definitely appreciate what Bullet

Train Blast have to offer.

'Shake Rattle Racing' is actually album number three from the quintet from Aarhus, Denmark and follows their 2009 debut 'Second Chance' and 2012's well-received 'Nothing Remains'. While thinking about current Danish bands it dawned on me that BTB's sound certainly bears references to their Denmark counterparts Volbeat and Supercharger.

The big choruses and harmonies aren't quite as blatantly obvious as those on the aforementioned WAH release. But very much in evidence they certainly are, as Bullet Train Blast shake rattle and race through a slew of gritty, hard-riffing, adrenaline-fuelled, groove-orientated Hard Rock/Metal anthems, with occasional Punky attitude and aggressiveness slicing through an abundance of fiery, yet catchy as hell, songs.

It's as contemporary sounding as the likes of the Foo Fighters come yet incorporates the odd Southern Rock riff or Bluesy lick here and there. They come across like a heavier Black Stone Cherry, no more so than on 'Broken', 'When Fools Rise' and the title track that opens the album.

Elsewhere 'Head Above Water' is all AC/DC style riffage, the abrasive riff and groove of 'Game Over' hints at a more commercial Alter Bridge, the fast and furious 'Oh Desire' is a hit single in the making and 'The Fighter' has a riff that Zakk Wylde would happily adopt as one of his own.

The foot comes off the gas a little for the album's two classy ballads, 'Right Reasons' and 'I Think I'll Stay', which both appear in the first half of the album and let the second half build to a pounding climax.

'Shake Rattle Racing' is an album I found energetic, powerful and damn enjoyable.

Ant Heeks

BURNING POINT – 'BURNING POINT' *(AFM)* POWER METAL

Finnish Metallers Burning Point are back with a new self-titled album which is very good news for fans of this excellent Melodic Power Metal band. However, on this occasion, things are a little different; that is because band leader, main song-writer and singer/guitarist Pete Ahonen has decided to step away from lead vocals duties. In his place, BP have invited ex-Battle Beast vocalist Nitte Valo to take up the microphone and this has given BP not only a new lease of life, but also an exciting and different sound/feel to their music.

To introduce their new chanteuse, the band have done a bit of a half and half release which sees them re-working six old songs with Valo's vocals and then adding to the mix a further four new tracks. Generally, I am not a fan of this way of doing things, always being one to prefer an album full of new songs. But having a female vocalist singing the older tracks gives them all a real kick in the crotch and Valo certainly owns them.

The album opens with the first of the new songs, the scorching 'In The Shadows'; three minutes of screaming anger and muscle. This one song lets you know straight away that maybe Ahonen has done the right thing by stepping aside and it allows the band and Valo to hit you with all guns blazing, leaving a quivering bloody wreck in their wake. 'Find Your Soul' and 'My Darkest Times' are two further new offerings, the former a song that has guitar riffs that roar and a rhythm section that sounds like a thunderstorm whilst the latter is a mid-paced Rocker with some great keyboard runs; again it's Valo's vocals that are the focal point on both tracks. The last new cut is 'Queen Of Fire' which has a fantastic sing-along chorus and the band performances throughout the track are stellar.

The re-recorded selections are, 'All The Madness', 'Signs Of Danger', 'Heart Of Gold', 'Into The Fire', 'Dawn Of The Ancient War' and 'Blackened The Sun' where the inclusion of Valo really shakes things up and changes the way these songs sound. Don't get me wrong, I've always liked Ahonen's voice but Valo brings something new to each one of these. Her delivery is faultless and she belts out the lyrics with pure relish never giving an inch and the enjoyment she seems to be having is then transferred to the listener.

I think BP fans old and new will get a real kick out of listening to this album and they will find a band revitalised and ready to begin a new chapter in their ongoing story.

Ian Johnson

CAIN'S OFFERING – 'STORMCROW' *(Frontiers)* POWER METAL

Something of a Finnish "super-group" project put together a few years back by former Sonata Arctica guitarist Jani Liimatainen, Cain's Offering raised more than a few eyebrows with the release of their 'Gather The Faithful' debut in the fall of 2009.

Featuring as it did Stratovarius front-man Timo Kotipelto and keyboard maestro Mikko Harkin (also ex-SA/Kenziner), the bombastically overblown blend of Stratovarius, SA, Nightwish, Leverage and Iron Maiden (even with some Europe thrown in at times) was a real melting pot of juxtaposable moods and conflicting emotions; an enigmatic yet thoroughly compelling collage of Hard Rock, Symphonic, Power and Speed Metal influences.

Aside from the aforementioned Liimatainen and Kotipelto, only drummer Jani Hurula remains from the '...Faithful' line-up, but with Kotipelto's Stratovarius colleague Jens Johansson taking over on keyboards and bassist Jonas Kuhlberg joining the fray, sophomore outing 'Stormcrow' has all the potential to reach out to an even greater audience. "Stirring Hard Rock melodies bolted on to flamboyant Power Metal Symphonies" still defines the CO approach (as you'd naturally expect given those involved) – witness the rampaging 'Constellation Of Tears', the galloping 'Rising Sun' or rousing opener 'Stormcrow' – but every now and then there's a welcome hint of forward momentum as slightly different influences come into the mix.

'The Best Of Times' for example comes across as a slightly less aggressive Amaranthe with maybe just a touch of Children Of Bodom (no Death Metal grunts though!), 'My Heart Beats For No One' has a hint of My Chemical Romance and atmospheric ballad 'Too Tired To Run' underscores a classic Scandie sound with a Neo-Gothic, almost whimsical, orchestral lilt. On top of that, for some reason I'm actually quite drawn to the lengthy instrumental piece 'I Am Legion', not least because had they gone the whole hog and put vocals to it, it would've given the likes of Within Temptation a real run for their money!

For some unknown reason, nobody does this kind of stuff quite as well as the Finns; all in all 'Stormcrow' is a classy, well executed meshing of worlds.

Dave Cockett

CAPTAIN HORIZON – 'IMITATION SUN' *(Rocksector)* MODERN/ALTERNATIVE

Often music is best reviewed by pigeon-holing it, categorising it and putting it into a nice tidy genre box that helps the reader to decide who else it might sound like before they buy it. That goes out of the window with Birmingham-based (U.K.) Captain Horizon and their second album 'Imitation Sun'.

HEAVENS GATE – 'BEST FOR SALE!' *(Limb)* HEAVY METAL

They've got the title right; the well-respected Heavens Gate, who split in 1999 and contained the highly regarded Sascha Paeth (who is still in demand), have not returned which bucks the current trend, but have produced a "Best Of" compilation which shows exactly why they are missed. This is almost flawless, full of outstanding, accessible Melodic Metal with Hard Rock moments and shows where Firewind picked up some of their sound from.

Highlights? Well, 'Surrender' is classic pushy Metal in the vein of Judas Priest, 'Tyrants' really tries to rush about, proclaiming itself "hard as a rock, cold as the steel" and giving us double helpings of burning guitars, the bass break in 'Flashes', the solo taking us to the skies in 'Under Fire', simple AC/DC revved up riffing in 'Rising Sun' and the 1970's Hard Rock accessibility of 'On The Edge' with its charming melody. To be honest, pick almost any from the seventeen tracks here, you can hardly miss.

There are a couple of missteps; the bagpipe-led 'He's The Man' with its parping synth annoyance and the rather anodyne 'Path Of Glory', but that is a rarity even in a "Best Of". Often called Power Metal and mentioned with fellow Teutons Rage and Running Wild, this is pure Heavy Metal with a dash of Hard Rock; only when they go towards the Power, perhaps to fulfil others' views, do they come unstuck.

This is pure unadulterated fun. Paeth a master with the plectrum, Rettke's warm and roaring pipes something to treasure, when they call it the best, they mean it; close to heaven...

Steve Swift

In general, and it seems particularly pertinent in 2015, I've seen a huge rise in free thinking British bands who aren't afraid to experiment and come up with something that disposes of the bland and ordinary, choosing instead something far more original and exciting. With that in mind, it's almost impossible to allocate a genre to CH – a moniker that surely describes the band's attempt to steer their music away from calm waters and into something more choppy and unpredictable in the distance – as they manage to encompass (no pun intended) a whole plethora of genres, sub genres and soundscapes.

It can make for a difficult listen; opener 'Can't You See What I've Become' is an Alternative Progressive Rock song with elements of The Cult and Thin Lizzy permeating through the guitar work. Vocalist Steven "Whitty" Whittington's rasping growl brings a Graham Bonnet-like air to the proceedings and there's a welcome eclecticism running through songs like the U2-tinged 'The Dark' or the Progressive 'Sword'. Just when you think that you "get it", CH throw you a curve ball as on the gentle acoustic 'It Matters To You'.

Save for the slight commercial edge of 'Silence Of Vera', there's really nothing here to suggest that Captain Horizon will be troubling the U.K. singles chart anytime soon. But I suspect that they wouldn't have it any other way, feeling happier making the music that they want whilst remaining original and true to themselves; for that they must be admired.

Mike Newdeck

CASVADELL – 'BULL BY THE HORNS' *(Bird Drop)* HARD ROCK

Watching Ricky Burns fight against Figueroa recently, it was apparent that, despite the great slugging battle though they had both had, by the tenth round of the twelve, Burns was struggling a bit because he had set off at such a frenetic pace that he just couldn't maintain it.

Pacing… it's all important, particularly in albums – just when you think it's all over, 'Led Zeppelin IV' pins you to the wall with 'When The Levee Breaks', Asia's debut takes the breath away with the impudent 'Here Comes The Feeling'; leaving you smiling, sweaty and serene – an important factor to get you coming back for more.

Casvadell don't stay the pace. They race out of the blocks with a one-two punch, but once that's absorbed, they show very little variety or staying power. 'My Eyes Are Opening' shows that Classic Rock influence which is all over their biog; fuzzy, frantic and with a rough charm which the mid-point narrative section nails beautifully. They follow this up with 'Nothing To Take' and it's softer, sourmash, Cadillac 3 styling. This is more or less all, as everything else that come afterwards too often bring the words "not bad" to mind.

Sometimes the riff is all there is, sometimes we have heard it before (the ZZ Top/Howlin' Rain mash up of 'Thunder Of God' has its moments), sometimes it's just a little unfinished. It tries hard ('Bull By The Horns' is handing out drinks, snacks and condoms to one and all just to get the Funky party going) and Davin Burson really enjoys his soloing, as should we, but it's just not enough.

This is a band to shuffle into the pack, Casvadell are not as good as the first two songs implied they would be. They don't really take the 'Bull By The Horns', they just tickle it round the flanks a bit and then run away.

Steve Swift

CHÂLICE – 'OVERYEARS SENSATION' *(Keiler)* HARD ROCK

Mainland Europe has never been overly prolific within the arena of Rock music. Yes, we've had the likes of Golden Earring, Focus, Scorpions, Gotthard, Bonfire et al, but they are the exception to the rule compared with the U.K., U.S.A. and, more recently, Scandinavia. However, it's not through a lack of trying – there has always been a strong second-tier of artists who, for whatever reason, have perpetually tried to break through, but never quite hit those dizzy heights of "superstardom".

Germany's Châlice are a prime example; formed in the north German port of Hamburg in 1992, they have recently produced their seventh album containing fiery, Melodic Hard Rock that's delivered with passion, punch and insatiable intent. Right from the get-go, Gino Naschke (vocals), Oliver Scheer (guitars), Steve Lagleder (bass), Michael Mehl (drums) and Axel Hoffmann (keys) take no prisoners.

'You Better Get Used To It' has a Pink Cream 69 (circa 1991) vibe to it, and whilst the title track that follows is slightly more melodic, it still retains a Metal authority. What is instantly distinguishable are the Jon Lord-esque keyboard accompaniments; no surprise there really,

as the band have supported Deep Purple in the past – (Uriah Heep, Tesla, Nazareth and Alice Cooper have also shown faith in the band as their opening act).

Throughout the opus, Naschke is constantly spanning the vocal spectrum; whether it be the fast, Metal-tinged deliveries on 'Glorious Again' and 'Don't Tell Me Lies' or the mid-tempo melodic panache of 'All About Your Love' and 'Turn Away', he really does give it his all. Probably my favourite song on the album is 'Chasing The Wind' which is an amalgamation of styles and encompasses everything that the band has to offer, beginning with a delicate piano intro and culminating with rampant riffing.

One thing I must emphasise here; I truly believe it's imperative to listen to an album at least half a dozen times, as initially... even after several spins... I wasn't over enamoured by what was on show – but the songs gradually began to display themselves and if you appreciate any of the aforementioned bands, you will find something to enjoy here. Châlice also have a softer side; 'Sign Of The Times' is a commendable ballad and the short instrumental closer 'Last Wish' is a pleasant, serene way to conclude the opus.

I'm surmising that Châlice are a popular band to go and see live (within a certain radius) and this album would certainly justify that, especially with the volume cranked right up. But will 'Overyears Sensation' be the album that expands their fan base and finally elevate them to the next level? Only time will tell. A good effort though.

Dave Crompton

CHOLANE – 'CAUTION!' *(Yellow Snake)* HARD ROCK

German four-piece Cholane returns with their third studio album 'Caution!' The album was recorded at Frida Park studios in the band's hometown of Hannover and features an impressive production courtesy of Anca Graterol and Ossy Pfeiffer.

The band are built around the powerful vocal prowess of founding member Jürgen Wulfes whose voice sounds like a perfect blend of David Coverdale and Accept vocalists Udo Dirkschneider and Mark Tornillo. Naturally, with the twin guitars of Kai Steffen and Wulfes and the aforementioned vocal style, there will be and are obvious comparisons with fellow Teutonic Metal legends Accept. This can clearly be clearly heard on several songs like album opener 'Shake Your Bones', but there is far more to Cholane than merely Accept copycats.

'Wicked Man' perfectly mixes Metal and Classic Rock and sounds like a heavier Gotthard (think 'Firedance') whilst 'Streets On Fire' is more straight-ahead Metal similar to Saxon. The epic 'Get Down' was featured on the free cover-mount disc in the last issue and is more traditional Classic Hard Rock during the verses but reverts to classic Accept-style backing vocals during the chorus.

The song 'Stop' is reminiscent of another German band Victory whilst 'Deaf, Dumb & Blinded' is pure, grandiose Stadium Rock. The album's heaviest track is the unrestrained 'Grow Old' featuring some heavy bass courtesy of Niels Sörenhagen and double-kick drums of Daniel Knop and this is a complete contrast to the track that follows, the piano-led ballad 'Final Curtain'. 'Alive' has an early eighties Classic Rock vibe and you can definitely hear a bit of Coverdale in the vocals, similarly the next track 'Eternity' brings to mind Whitesnake or Stargazery. The band then switch back to pure Metal with the blistering Saxon-like 'Highway'.

In the litigious society that we live in today, I think that the underlying riff to 'Fading Away' is a little bit too close for comfort to the Scorpions classic 'Make It Real'. The Classic Rock of 'One Track Mind' ends the album in fine fashion.

The band very much sums up their own pedigree, "as our own style we're trying to be the missing link between 1980's Hard Rock and actual Heavy Metal"; with this release they have gone a very long way to achieving the latter.

Mark Donnelly

CHRIS FURY – 'FROM DARKNESS' *(Independent)* INSTRUMENTAL

Long Island native Chris Fury comes from a long line of guitar talents from that area, following in the footsteps of Joe Satriani, Steve Vai and John Petrucci, amongst others. Self-taught but with extra tuition from the amazing solo artist and sideman to the stars Greg Howe, Fury delivers thirteen varied instrumental numbers with skill and dexterity. He exhibits an acute understanding of the accessible composition skills that make the likes of Satriani and Eric Johnson so appealing.

Joined by bassist Ian Underwood, drummer Sebastian Persini and occasional keyboard player Jason Roddin, 'The Nexus' kicks things off with frantic shredding but thankfully settles into a gritty Blues Rock riff with some decidedly off-kilter soloing. Satriani-esque melodies and sounds abound can be found on 'Over Andover' and 'All Funked Up' does exactly what it says on the tin; like a track from Extreme's 'Pornograffitti' but without the vocals.

At the other end of the spectrum, the acoustic 'Byte The Bullet' features Jon Gomm-like syncopation and shades of Rik Emmett in the gentle mid-section. Other highlights include the beautiful ballad 'In Your Eyes', the riffy 'Autopilot Disengage', the acoustic-based 'Last Breath' and the Progressive light and shade epic 'Mystical Journey', where the only fault is the overdose of whammy bar à la Vai. In addition to his fledgling solo career, Fury writes for movies and TV which is where the atmospheric title track sounds like it comes from.

The off-the-wall 'Mogera', drum-heavy 'Lost Transmission' and 'A Fire Within' with its numerous riffs and time changes are all a little less palatable (nice bass showcase notwithstanding). There are also a few rough spots in the mix and a raw guitar sound mars 'Running Away' and brief sections of others, but the ideas are solid and 'From Darkness' ends up being an excellent achievement for a debut, self-financed album.

Available from certain online stores, www.chrisfury.com and iTunes, we may well be fondly looking back on this album in the future as the one that introduced a great talent.

Phil Ashcroft

CHRISTINA – 'THE LIGHT' *(Tigermoth)* ROCK

One would be forgiven for thinking that Christina Booth's second solo album would be a particularly maudlin affair when considering it was made against a backdrop of her battle against cancer and what I believe was the passing of both parents. However, whilst the lyrical content may be reflective of these considerable trials and tribulations, musically it's not downbeat or depressing; far from it in fact as there are any number of lovely melodies on offer.

Her supporting cast includes her Magenta band-mates and notably Rob Reed who provided the tunes (which are wonderful), produced and mixed the album; he's done a terrific job all round. Other contributors are the ubiquitous John Mitchell, Andy Tillison (The Tangent) and Theo Travis.

The album opens with 'Full Stop' which has a simple start with a slow electric piano refrain and voice on the verse before the tempo increases on the chorus as the other instruments join in. I can't help think of Randy Crawford (The Crusaders) on the chorus. Being churlish, the repeated outro is overly long.

'Stay' builds nicely, this time with piano setting the scene albeit with some delightful orchestration fleshing out the sound. I'm not a big fan of saxophone but Travis's sax and flute accentuations are very pleasing here. 'Legend In The Making' has a different feel with a modern edgy guitar chord heralding the initial dark theme; this is soon replaced with something more traditional and lighter. The chorus is one that's become stuck in my head.

'Disappeared' has a mournful piano refrain which, if my interpretation of the lyrics is correct (the failing memory of a loved one), is hardly surprising. This song has a quality that means it wouldn't be out of place in a West End musical. It's a beautiful piece. 'When The Darkness Falls' has an Annie Haslam's Renaissance feel on the verse and the chorus puts me in mind of a James Bond theme. Again, Reed's orchestration is splendid and reinforces that filmic quality.

'The Anger In Your Words' is another track that builds, Tillison providing some subtle Hammond Organ and then either Chris Fry or Mitchell, or indeed both, adding a short but sweet guitar solo at the end. 'The Same Old Road' is a beautiful ballad on which Christina excels vocally and which Reed's music complements perfectly.

'Last Breath' is up-tempo with a bouncy feel which belies the lyrical theme, I particularly like the vocal arrangement and little burst of Hammond Organ. The title track closes out the album in optimistic fashion and, again, the melody is wonderful and the orchestration terrific.

Whatever style you ascribe to, this is a splendid album.

Gary Marshall

CROSSPLANE – 'MASTURBONED' *(7Hard)* HEAVY METAL

It is said that imitation is the sincerest form of flattery. There are those who pretend to be stars to gain money and preferment. There are those who say they are stars until people come round to their way of thinking – look at 'The Only Way Is Essex' (not too long of course, there's only so much eyewash out there). Then there are others who love the music of their favourite performers so much that they play that music every week, as close as they can get it, to show how much they love it and to make money, of course. My favourite act? A tribute to Meatloaf – Maltloaf.

Crossplane from Germany play heavy Rock 'n' Roll and are keen to tell us that they are not a tribute act. Bloody close though. These gents have a love of Lemmy Kilminster, "Fast" Eddie Clarke and Phil "Philthy Animal" Taylor and all things Motörhead; the band who, if they moved in next door, your lawn would die. Of course it's not all Motörheadedness, but Celli doesn't half sound like Kilmister and the riffs have the chunky speed that the band are renowned for.

'Brave New World' and 'Bumsucker' (yerrsss...) have very little except the speed, kick and punch of the originators and are joined by 'Maneater' with its rabble rousing chorus and 'Get The Rhythm' which is such a good knock off; seriously, it could be on 'Stars In Their Eyes'.

When they decide to break free from the protective clasp of The Claw, they are so much more successful; 'Rock 'N' Roll Medicine' is so much more accessible and 'The Battle In Me' has a lovely lagging groove and smudgy Funk centre, there is clearly hope.

HELLOWEEN – 'MY GOD-GIVEN RIGHT' *(Nuclear Blast)* HEAVY METAL

"Just good, old, classic Heavy Metal" states Michael Weikath about this new album and I don't disagree with him one little bit. With a glorious Martin Hausler cover, 'My God-Given Right' has all the hallmarks of their classic 1980's and 1990's heyday. Leaving aside the experimental last two albums of the Michael Kiske era, there is much here to equate them with their pomp.

Long-time Helloween aficionados are going to enjoy everything on offer here, but the more recent recruits may lament the absence of any true Power Metal offerings. The thing is, despite pioneering, to a certain extent, the Power Metal genre, Helloween never truly embraced it – they were more the pioneers of Melodic Speed Metal – and after 'Pink Bubbles Go Ape' and 'Chameleon' truly flummoxed their fans, they've had to work incredibly hard to get back to the pantheon reserved for the great and iconic Metal bands of history.

Helloween have delivered an album that firmly puts them back in that bracket. Produced once again by Charlie Bauerfiend, it would be a major surprise if this album was anything less than spectacular sonically as well as artistically.

Kicking off with a fast-paced anthemic number, 'Heroes' (with its great solo) sets the tone that leads us into first single and the Weikath-penned 'Battle's Won' with its 'Dr Stein' feel (for me) and unusual descending key in the chorus. The title track again picks up the pace with pounding drums from Daniel Loble and a typical Andi Deris melodic chorus. The title is derived from a quote from Deris' father once said to him upon finishing school.

Helloween fans will notice that there are less Weikath songs included these days, but it's through choice. 'Creatures In Heaven' and 'Claws' are also his, the former typical fast-paced Helloween with a rhythmic verse full of melody and noticeable Hammond Organ and the latter (again) fast-paced but heavy with intricate rhythm and melody patterns – schizophrenic with twin solos that aren't strictly straight-ahead.

With most of the songs in a happy Helloween style, like the Deris-penned anthemic and super melodic 'Stay Crazy', the darker numbers so beloved by the newer fans include the heavy and dark closing number 'You, Still Of War' and the rhythmic marching of 'The Swing Of A Fallen World'.

But I couldn't leave you without mentioning 'Lost In America'; based on a true story of their aircraft pilot announcing he was lost whilst flying over America. Fast-paced and melodic with the line "we are high, we are far, but we wonder where we are, we are lost, lost in America'.

Helloween have released an "in-your-face" classic Helloween album because they have nothing to prove to anybody; for that I applaud them.

Carl Buxton

HOUSE OF LORDS – 'INDESTRUCTIBLE' *(Frontiers)* HARD ROCK

The 1980's Melodic Rock scene may have produced some of the most successful hard and heavy artists that the music biz has ever seen (before or since), but as the decade wore on, it became abundantly clear that creativity had basically been sacrificed on the altar of all things commercial. Like some bastardised version of Walmart, the industry had pretty much chewed everything up and spat it out again in easily digestible packages.

There were some notable exceptions such as Tesla and Great White flying the flag for individuality, sticking steadfastly to their principles (even if it negatively impacted those all-important sales), and then there were the "real" musicians…like the much maligned Winger or more pointedly House Of Lords.

The very existence of HOL can probably be attributed to Kiss man Gene Simmons – after all he signed one time Angel keyboard maestro Gregg Giuffria's band and then insisted they dump David Glen Eisley in favour of former L.A. Rocks front-man James Christian. HOL released three musically stunning albums (yes, I'm including the underrated 'Demon's Down') before folding in the early 1990s, only to reform a decade or so later (without Giuffria) for the much misunderstood 'The Power And The Myth'.

The grand reunion would ultimately prove to be somewhat short lived, but for the past decade or so Christian has kept the House Of Lords name alive, releasing a steady stream of strong new material with a band that, in many respects, is every bit as talented as its illustrious forerunner. By my reckoning, 'Indestructible' is the tenth full-length studio set to bear the name (their sixth in a fantastic decade started by 'World Upside Down') and anyone thinking they must've run out of ideas by now can think again because nothing is further from the truth!

Christian's partnership with guitarist Jimi Bell, bassist Chris McCarvill and drummer BJ Zampa remains as solid as ever as they once again crank out a succession of oft heavy, mood driven riffs wrapped around some of the most hypnotically catchy melodies you'll find anywhere this year. Opener 'Go To Hell' is a real contrast of styles – its opening choral chants soon give way to some really vitriolic riffing à la Gotthard, before they hit you straight between the eyes with an absolute monster of a Royal Hunt styled chorus. 'Pillar Of Salt' has a real Led Zeppelin flavour, the pulsing 'Another Dawn' (another great chorus more like) has class written all over it, 'Indestructible' itself is one of those cool, low slung shuffles... okay you get the picture.

With creativity still very much at a premium, it's nice to see that there are still some bands you can rely on to deliver the goods!

Dave Cockett

For those worried about the recent cancelled gigs and the wait for a new album, this will be a breathless treat. And the title track is as catchy as a verucca at a swimming pool; greasy, grimy and grand. 'Masturboned' is worth more than a laugh at the title, but at sixteen tracks, the slavish adherence rather saps the strength.

This certainly has some iron fist but also brings some Metal fatigue.

Steve Swift

CRYSTAL BALL – 'LIFERIDER' *(Massacre)* HARD ROCK

Back in the mists of time when I was an impressionable kid (and no, dinosaurs didn't quite roam the earth… the odd sabre-toothed tiger maybe), the line between Heavy Metal and Hard Rock was fairly well defined. The former had the angst and intensity necessary to mobilise the masses whilst the latter generally had the bigger hooks and melodies; over the ensuing decades however that line has become so blurred as to be rendered ostensibly irrelevant.

Think about it for a minute... there are now some truly great Metal bands out there with a whole catalogue of incredibly catchy songs to their name, yet at the same time there are countless examples of Classic Hard Rock acts with enough "oomph" to send your senses reeling. And then there are those who purport to have a foot in both camps... bands like Swiss Rockers Crystal Ball.

Cut from the same illustrious cloth as fellow countrymen Krokus and Gotthard, the CB riff quotient has always remained impressively high, but auspiciously never at the expense of great tunes. Having sort of ground to a halt after 2007's 'Secrets' opus, a much changed version of the band re-surfaced some six years later with the hard hitting 'Dawnbreaker'; a well-judged pre-emptive strike that really put their name back on the Rock 'n' Roll map. Thankfully, the wait for a follow up has been nowhere near as long, as the recent emergence of the well timed 'Liferider' should hold them in particularly good stead on the impending summer circuit.

Knowing their audience as they do, CB don't attempt to reinvent the wheel; if, like me, a dose of classic European Metal à la Gotthard mixed with the bombastically outgoing hooks and melodies of Bonfire or Jaded Heart gets those "ol' juices" flowing, then 'Liferider; is most definitely for you. Punchy, "in your face" riffs and a cocky swagger is the CB stock in trade, and tracks like 'Mayday', 'Balls Of Steel' 'Eye To Eye' (featuring Battle Beast's Noora Louhimo) and 'Rock Of Life' reinforce that, yet as I said earlier, they all come with strong hooks and melodies.

Furthermore, for those of you needing a little extra persuasion, the choice of bonus tracks is interesting with the late, great Ronnie James Dio getting the nod twice (once as Dio, once with Black Sabbath)… intriguing choice as in many respects Crystal Ball could be seen as the Swiss Dio (the band).

Solid effort…nuff said really!

Dave Cockett

DARKOLOGY – 'FATED TO BURN' *(Prime Eon)* HEAVY METAL

For far too long, the traditional U.S. Metal market has lain dormant, a sleeping giant dreaming of glories past with scant regard for anything post the Nirvana-led apocalypse. However, with the global music industry in crisis and popular tastes dictated by an increasingly bland succession of talentless wannabees, those with even half a brain have started to defy convention and seek out something... anything with a little more substance behind it. As such, the grassroots support for Metal is starting to mobilize once again, and with renewed interest affording an opportunity for new talent to shine, previously overlooked bands are being exposed to a much wider audience.

Built around brothers Michael (Chastain, Thought Chamber, etc.) and Brian (Firewind) Harris on guitars and drums respectively, and featuring respected vocalist Kelly Sundown Carpenter (Adagio, Beyond Twilight), Darkology could be considered as something of a beacon for a whole new generation of Metal acts in the States. Their excellent debut 'Altered Reflections' emerged the best part of six years ago, but with other commitments keeping them busy in the interim, it's taken them much longer than originally anticipated to craft a follow up. Thankfully, the long wait is now over and 'Fated To Burn' is finally upon us.

Mixed by veteran knob twiddler Chris Tsangarides and shrouded in atmospheric angst, '...Burn' continues the fine work laid down by its predecessor and aims straight for the hearts and minds of anyone with a penchant for classic Savatage, Beyond Twilight, Crimson Glory, Metal Church (circa their classic 'The Dark' opus) and Armored Saint (with a customary nod towards both Black Sabbath and Judas Priest).

With riffs spiralling out of control and a dark malevolent presence making itself felt from the get go, opener 'Kill Me If You Can' just screams MC – if I'm honest, I haven't heard anyone do it this well since MC were in their prime! The album's real "piece de resistance" is the nine minute plus epic 'Nightmare King'; a broiling, swirling vortex of constantly shifting moods that really shows what the band is capable of (if we hadn't guessed already). But in reality, if angst ridden Metal with darkly twisted melodies is your thing, you really won't go wrong with any of the likes of 'On Morrow's Break', 'Quantum Genocide' or 'Holy' (to name but three).

I will be the first to admit, your average AOR diehard (the pink and fluffy brigade) will probably not be impressed when 'Fated To Burn' roars out of their speakers, but for those of us who were raised on a more varied diet, Darkology are definitely a band to watch.

Dave Cockett

DARKTRIBE – 'THE MODERN AGE' *(Scarlet)* POWER METAL

Darktribe formed in 2009 and recorded their first EP, 'Natural Defender', that same year. The band have now signed to Scarlet Records and have just released their second album entitled 'The Modern Age' which was mixed and mastered by none other than Jacob Hansen at Hansen Studios in Denmark.

Starting with a Symphonic and Techno-Metal instrumental ('Humanizer'), the album quickly moves to 'Red House Of Sorrow'; the speed is quick and the energy is high – very much in the vein of DragonForce. The pace rarely slackens, the double kick drum pedalling is full-on, the keyboards are high in the mix and the powerful but melodic guitar leads the affray throughout. Standout moments for me are the harmonised guitar solos in the epic 'My Last Odyssey' and the even more epic 'A Last Will'.

Luckily, with the amount of keyboards, guitars and unceasing bass and drums, Darktribe has a good singer in Anthony Agnello; his vocals are powerful and cut through the instruments. His versatile ability is also put to good effect in the slower moments such as the ending of 'Holy Water Day' and the chanting close to 'Anthem For A Planet'.

The band as a unit delivers on this album and it is well produced – crystal clear with nice bits of light and shade. So if you like you're Metal fast, Symphonic, loud and melodic – give this a try.

Rob McKenzie

DAVID ARTHUR – 'MAKING LEGENDS' *(Independent)* PROGRESSIVE

While certainly a new name to me, David Arthur is certainly not new to the scene, having been playing professionally and semi-professionally for over twenty years. During this time, he not only wrote songs with renowned producer Chris Tsangarides, but in 2010 co-wrote and recorded 'The Rapture' with NWOBHM band Bitches Sin.

Arthur's own songs, as evidenced on his debut solo album 'Making Legends', are very different to that of the NWOBHM genre, displaying a far more Progressive bent. He describes them as "if 30 Seconds To Mars met Bruce Springsteen and if Muse met Def Leppard", but from my own perspective, I'd say it was more a case of "thoughtful Melodic Hard Rock with many Progressive elements, married to powerful, intelligent guitaring"

Arthur's vocal style is very much predisposed towards a more Progressive Rock style, as can clearly been heard while listening to the likes of opener 'We Are The Taken', 'Making Legends' and 'Scratches'. Even the more Melodic Hard Rock numbers such as 'You Still Give Me Hope' (with its glorious guitar soloing), 'To Feel' (a bonus track) and 'Illusions' all contain elements of Progressive Rock within their frame.

On several tracks, Arthur's good friend Mel Woods takes over lead vocals, with 'Waiting' being a duet, and while hearing a female vocal makes for an enjoyable change of focus for the listener, the underlying themes and overall feel remain distinctly Progressive, with Arthur showing just what a talented musician and composer he is, supplying all the musical backing and the intelligent and thoughtful lyrics.

'Watch This Space' is a more modern sounding track, the hard riffing propelling the track forward with an intense urgency, while closer 'One Day' is a glorious ballad, predominantly guitar and vocal and supplying a delightful counterpoint to the rest of the album.

Throughout 'Making Legends', David Arthur displays just what a talented "one-man band" he truly is. On the evidence displayed here, a bright future is surely beckoning, especially within the burgeoning Progressive scene. Check him out on the closing track of our free CD/download this issue.

Bruce Mee

DENDERA – 'PILLARS OF CREATION' *(Metalbox)* HEAVY METAL

Dendera have long been one of the South Coast's hidden gems and with this album we may well have to start sharing them with everyone because they honestly deserve a wider audience. 'Pillars Of Creation' is the follow up to 'The Killing Floor' and a bloody fine progression it is too.

The "comparison" often thrown at them is that of Iron Maiden which is somewhat understandable as they have epic Heavy Metal songs combined with Ashley Edison's vocal range that immediately brings to mind Bruce Dickinson; there is much of Rob Halford about his singing too.

ICONIC EYE – 'HIDDEN IN PLAIN SIGHT' *(Sky-Rocket)* MELODIC ROCK

What better way to celebrate summer than with an album that swathes you with soothing rays of sunshine whilst sea breezes gently ripple through your hair (that's if you're lucky enough to still have any left, of course).

Iconic Eye was born from the exceptional talents and vision of Greg Dean (guitars), and subsequently he then recruited Dave Wasson (guitars), Gary Slater (bass), Paul 'Emo' Emery (drums), and not one, but two vocalists; the mercurial Lee Small (best known for his work with Phenomena, Shy, Skyscraper) and the not too dissimilar, Tim Dawkes.

The allusion towards Small should give some indication of the quality and direction of 'Hidden In Plain Sight', but don't think for one moment that he alone carries the expectations of the band on his vastly experienced shoulders. Small (five songs) was initially enlisted to carry out session vocals whilst Dawkes (seven songs) was later revealed as the "undiscovered jewel in the crown". Having already won Firebrand's 'Band Of The Year 2014' and cemented their place at this year's Download Festival, IE are now fully operational and raring to unleash their silky musicianship on the AOR fraternity.

Small dominates the opening third of the album; if that was a premeditated ploy to lure the audience in, there really was no need. Opener, 'Now That I've Found Love' is an infectious, insouciant song driven by effervescent keys that will have even your Grandma dancing around like a crazed hobgoblin. 'You Make It' continues the trend with another catchy chorus but with the guitars beginning to show their teeth and provide an edge. 'All She Needed' shows a slightly darker side to Iconic Eye with its throbbing rhythm section and modern guitar tones… but yet another great chorus. 'Don't Stop Me From Leaving' could well be the prodigal offspring from Skyscraper's 'Elevation' opus; it's sultry, Bluesy, yet so melodic.

What an opening quartet… but there's more – enter Dawkes! 'Let It Rain Down' immediately highlights what a fabulous find he is; a slow-tempo, emotion-wringer that will leave you agog! My absolute favourite, 'I Can Feel It', lifts spirits to the roof again and maybe should've opened the album. There is one cover song but what an interpretation!! Python Lee Jackson's 1972 hit 'In A Broken Dream' is nailed down so firmly by Dawkes that Rod Stewart would need the 'World Tug 'O' War' champions to rip it up... superb!! The Funky 'Better Place' and the melancholic 'You're On Your Own' are the home stretch highlights, but I can assure you every song's a praiseworthy inclusion.

We scribes at Fireworks often get digital copies of forthcoming albums, but if we approve we normally purchase afterwards for ourselves. Now, where's my credit card?!

Dave Crompton

'Claim Our Throne' is a pure wall of sound with every space filled with roar and soar until finally, like warriors returning wearily from battle, it slows down to the final fade. This is quickly followed by 'Bloodlust' which has plenty of pace and storms its way through to the big finish. On 'In High Tide' Edison draws up THAT voice from the bowels of the earth and sends it into the stratosphere, where it very likely to fell passing meteors.

'Disillusioned' ups the pace and you have to wonder how Dendera could ever make it through a gig without expiring, they produce enough energy here to out power a nuclear reactor. If you want to chill this is NOT the album for you, this is the equivalent of watching someone sprint a marathon.

'The Daylight Ending' sledgehammers its way into your consciousness, grabs your synapses and starts firing them on all six. The guitars duel like their route out of hell depends on it; frankly the Devil doesn't stand a chance. Lyrically Dendera have far more intelligence than many in the genre and I suspect this is one of the reasons that there is often this Maiden comparison. It won't bother Dendera in the slightest as they wear their influences unashamed and proud. Listening to 'The Chosen One' you can hear it's justified; it's reminiscent of their epic 'Senlac Hill' and will keep old fans very happy.

Unholy' is more Judas Priest-like and Edison growls and soars across the frenetic rhythm section with the sure footedness of a mountain goat. The howling guitars of (now departed) Tony Fuller and Steve Main scream like banshees and you sit back exhausted, wondering what the hell just happened. '...Pillars' is bought to its monumental close by 'Edge Of Tomorrows' which is an absolute head-banger of a song powered along by Andy Finch's spectrogram blurring drums.

I've seen Dendera many times and I promise you that it is extraordinary to see the quality of a true stadium band in clubs and bars. '...Floor' was a remarkable debut album and 'Pillars Of Creation' seals the promise in style.

Helen Bradley Owers

DOMMIN – 'RISE' *(DN)* MODERN/ALTERNATIVE

It's album number two for U.S.-based Dommin, as this band 'Rise' from being hopefuls with obvious heroes into a band capable of setting their own agenda. The debut, (which arrived some five years ago) 'Love Is Gone', set about slamming HIM, Type O Negative, The 69 Eyes and Danzig into each other at high speed and watching what happened; the result being a solid punch of Goth-tinged Metal that impressed and hinted at more to come.

'Rise' seriously ups the ante, a stronger sense of individuality still employing the same influences to offer up a sound showing more maturity, more live long in the memory moments and more resistance to being removed from your play-list rotation.

Singer Kristofer Dommin eases up on the Elvisisms that so characterised his earlier work and while there's no denying that his deep, resonating tones still remind of an upbeat Peter Steele (R.I.P.), the strength of the songs themselves make the vocals less of an obvious stand out.

Instead it's the intricate arrangements and use of occasional synths which add atmosphere as they craft a set of songs which range from the thumpingly eerie 'The Quiet Man', almost Poppy 'Falling Into Ashes', shout along until your voice gives out 'Manipulator Girl' and TON homage of 'Damsel In Distress'. 'Manipulator…' in particular shows that Dommin may just have the hooks and reined in quirk to break into a wider audience; big choruses draped around crafted Rock which thumps and grinds in all the right places, while still eliciting silly grins and mass sing-alongs.

'The Girls' may take this ethos a little too far, the clanging bells in the intro almost reminding of a Christmas advert for Boots or John Lewis, although the song itself could definitely be the sort of thing you'd hear in some fang-infested teen movie – and if it did I'm sure Dommin wouldn't complain. Add in the almost Pop Rock jaunt of 'Next Day Apologies' or heart tugging but still heartily reverberating 'There You Are' and there's a real suggestion that Dommin could suddenly break big with this album, taking their existing audience with them.

With the '...Gone' album making such a strong introduction to this band, I had expected to be impressed by this follow up. However with 'Rise', Dommin have taken a considerable step forward and a marked step up in class. If they can get themselves the right exposure, 2015 could be their year.

Steven Reid

DOOMSDAY OUTLAW – 'BLACK RIVER' *(Independent)* HEAVY METAL

Doomsday Outlaw are a Hard Rock/Heavy Metal band from Derbyshire who formed in 2013 and have just released their debut 'Black River'. Introducing the album is the title track where first impressions are a concoction of Black Label Society with Black Stone Cherry, sadly I wish it all "tasted just as good as it sounds".

For a start, the guitars are too loud and it gives an impression that they are over compensating along with drowning out the rest of the recorded elements. With 'Down', DO have tried to be extra raw and dirty but the song is far too distorted and a lot is missing due to the production, as the mix is far from reaching the best levels that it could. Lyrically, there are no real hooks to draw you in and engage with the track.

'Judgement Day' has a similar feel to 'Down', the melody is a bit dull and by the time the solo has come in, you have become disinterested which is a shame as the solo is something the track has going for it. 'New Salvation' is a predictable song in that it arrives with a slower entrance and builds to some climax; the solo is actually a great feature and maybe nearer the point when the track should started to come to an end instead of going on for another two minutes longer than, in my opinion, it should have.

The album showcases some excellent playing from guitarists Steve and Gavin but the overall aim seems to be for the album to be powerful, raw and high volume as possible. Instead what has happened is the sound is overly distorted, which makes their material lack fullness. There is a missing back-beat and snare which would really give their music some punch, drive and rhythm and is something that would have enhanced the album a great deal.

There is no "easy to pinpoint" drawback on this album but I am left with a feeling like something is missing or that something is not quite connecting somewhere. Whatever it is, maybe this is something that can be rectified with further experience and time together, as Doomsday Outlaw gig and work their way towards their next album.

Lara Kisel

DYGITALS – 'DYNAMITE' *(Mausoleum)* HARD ROCK

What is great about 2015 is seeing the reappearance, and in some cases the continuation, of so many bands with history that dates back to the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s. Joining the trend are Dygitals, formed in 1984 with reunions in 2003, 2005 and 2009, who are back with their latest album 'Dynamite'.

The title track is pacey Hard Rock with a catchy tongue-twister of a riff. '30 Years Of Rock' is a tribute to Rock bands throughout the decades but it doesn't offer much in tribute to them in terms of melody and punch. All the parts of Dygitals are competent and interesting, especially the guitar and drum parts, but the vocals lack any real depth and the tracks have a tendency to become a bit drone-like.

'No Speed Limit', for example, opens with great energy but the vocals just aren't equal in pitch and delivery to match the instrumentation. The solos on the album are a showcase of David Dugaro's and Jean-Marc Lavayssiere's skill, running up and down the finger-board throughout the album. The guitar work is definitely the highlight of the album. It's light-hearted, fun and even a little bit cheeky. The opening of 'Everybody Knows' is reminiscent of Gotthard's 'I Know You Know' with a chilling, muted tone on the guitar.

You never really feel like Dygitals have a signature sound as such, one that unites the whole album. Consequently, there's sparks here and there, like the melodic chorus of 'Will You Help Me', but they're scattered, short-lived embers.

The classic track is 'We Wanna Live Free'; it's got pop and rhythm whilst vocalist Herve Traisnel makes good use of his higher range. Bassist Jack Gayffier takes centre stage in 'Don't Want To Let You Down' and the guitar and bass work in an almost conversational tandem.

It's an album with a lot of show; licks, tricks and twists are what Dygitals want to show you. This play-like approach from the guitarists definitely helps add some colour and character to an otherwise under-average album.

Sophie Brownlee

EMERALD SUN – 'METAL DOME' *(Fastball)* POWER METAL

With Greece (or more precisely the tanked Greek economy) being offered the kind of understanding and sympathy one might expect from a feudal warlord towards a Medieval leper colony in Europe, maybe it is the opportune time to shine a more positive light on the land that gave us democracy.

For those of you who haven't crossed paths with them before, let me introduce Power Metaller's Emerald Sun; a twin guitar/keyboard sextet hailing from Greece's second city (that's Thessaloniki to you an' me). The band have been together in one form or another since the late 1990s, so in many respects they should, by rights, be considered "elder statesmen" of the European Power Metal scene. After a couple of demo's and a self-financed debut that was never properly distributed, the band finally debuted proper in 2007 with the commendable 'Escape From Twilight', following it up some four years later with 'Regeneration'. Now however, it's time to move things forward with their third long player (oops, an old vinyl term slipped in there for some reason) 'Metal Dome'.

As with most Power Metal bands, Emerald Sun can certainly riff it up with the best of 'em – the twin guitar attack of Johnnie Athanasiadi and Pavlos Georgiadis is chock full of lightning fast runs and fluid licks – but there's an underlying melodic memorability that elevates them above the herd and puts them perhaps second only to the mighty Firewind

in their homeland. Throw in plenty of reflective interludes (check out 'Mere Reflection' and 'Freedom Call' and you'll see exactly what I mean) and an underlying theatrical atmosphere bordering, at times, on the Symphonic – credit to keyboard player Sefis Gioldasis for that feeling of epic grandeur – and you have a rather intriguing (to say the least) elixir of sounds and moods.

Vocalist Stelios "Theo" Tsakirides has the kind of commanding Metal roar that this particular discipline demands (powerful, yet melodic and resonant), and the intelligent use of multi-layered harmonies also helps to enhance the sonic dynamics on offer. From galloping opener 'Screamers In The Storm', through the bombastic 'Black Pearl' and the Stratovarius-like 'Legacy Of Night' to brooding closer 'Call Of Nature' (which features a duet with Liv Kristine from Leaves Eyes), Tsakirides proves his worth time and again.

If a mix of Dragonforce, Stratovarius and Firewind (with the odd nod towards the opulence of Rhapsody and the swagger of Manowar) sounds like it could be your thing, then 'Metal Dome' should hit the spot.

Dave Cockett

ERJA LYYTINEN – 'LIVE IN LONDON' *(Bluesland/Tuohi)* BLUES/SOUL

An acclaimed slide guitar player and vocalist from Finland, Erja Lyytinen has to date released a string of studio albums and decided the time was right for a live release. By choosing to record at the 100 Club in London, which has seen gigs from Blues stars like B.B. King and Muddy Waters to Rock legends like The Who and The Rolling Stones, Lyytinen has picked a fine venue to deliver a pure, powerful Blues album.

Flanked by Roger Inniss on bass, drummer Miri Miettinen and her long term musical partner and guitarist Davide Floreno, Lyytinen delivers strong and Soul drenched vocals while playing irresistible Blues licks and first rate slide guitar. The concert opens with an A Cappella cover of Fred McDowell's 'It's A Blessing' before the band break into a Lyytinen original, the entertaining 'Let It Shine'. Over the eleven songs performed, Lyytinen divides the set between her own compositions and covers of Elmore James tracks, including 'The Sky Is Crying' and a fourteen minute version of the classic 'Dust My Broom', which gives Floreno chance to showcase his considerable talents.

With half the set dedicated to James' material, if you're a big fan you may find it quite an adjustment to hear a young Finnish woman singing the songs, but they are performed with gusto and respect. There is added value with the album as it comes with a DVD of the performance. It's well filmed and perfectly captures the small, cramped stage, giving you a front row seat for what was clearly an intimate and tight show.

The emphasis is heavily on the Blues here, but if that's your thing, then it's well worth an hour of your time.

James Gaden

ESTRELLA – 'WE WILL GO ON' *(Independent)* MELODIC ROCK

'We Will Go On' is the second album from young Scottish band Estrella. It's vibrant energetic "traditional" AOR – in other words good time, feel good stuff. It's also an album that attempts to cover all the bases.

'Here I Am' (the album's first single), 'Wheels Keep Turning' and title track (as well as second single) 'We Will Go On' have big anthemic, sing-along choruses. 'This Heaven' and 'Be There' find the band in a more mature and controlled mode. 'Undercover Lover' and 'Rock City' are brash, noisy and more dangerous than most, the former benefitting from some nice string sound embellishments, while the latter (like the Saxon track of the same name) sounds prepped for live performance. 'Hard To Get' and album closer 'My Own Way' are more Bluesy and, for me, the pick of the crop.

Do I have a reservation? Well, cited influences include Aerosmith, Def Leppard, AC/DC, Van Halen and Bon Jovi, and although the claim is that "Estrella add a refreshing new feel to the Rock genre", there is room to doubt that they really offer anything that goes beyond the work of their influences. Despite its big soulful riff, 'Reason' (for example) has a strong sense of Steven Tyler about the vocal delivery and melody. Similarly 'Hold On' sounds like a weak BJ track.

At times perhaps, '...On' is a bit "Anthemic Rock by numbers". Estrella display an undoubtedly honed craft but one that's sometimes lacking a touch in guile or novelty. At other times, however, they really sound like they mean it, with guitarist Luke Gunn producing fiery lead work that lifts the songs and maintains the listener's interest. Certainly '...On' is an album that sells Estrella as a live proposition and one can easily imagine many of these songs coming alive on stage.

I saw them live once when they were giving bottles of lager out to the audience. If memory serves me well, it got them an encore. Despite reservations about its originality, 'We Will Go On' is appealing and consistent enough to suggest that Estrella don't need gimmicks. When they Rock, they Rock.

Michael Anthony

IZZ – 'EVERLASTING INSTANT' *(Doone)* PROGRESSIVE

This is the sixth full-length studio album from U.S.-based Prog band Izz but it's apparently also the last in a three-part series which began with 'The Darkened Room' in 2009 and continued with 'Crush of Night' three years later. According to Tom Galgano (keys, vocals, producer, engineer) many of the melodies, rhythms and lyrics on this album began as seeds on the previous two.

With this album there is a slight shift in the band's sound; hitherto they've had what I think of as the American Prog traits of staccato riffs and sharp changes in themes, here the feel is of the smoother European style. Also, the female vocals of Anmarie Byrnes and Laura Meade are more prominent rather than just providing backing vocals. Byrnes takes the lead on 'Like A Straight Line', which concludes the album in joyous style, and Meade on 'If It's True'. A comparison would be the early albums of Glass Hammer, although Izz produce more additive melodies.

One notable factor is that most of the tracks are reasonably lengthy which allows the band to explore various directions and themes but never do they overstay their welcome or become tiresome.

'Own The Mystery' opens with electric piano and voice before drums and a lovely flute join in. The vocal arrangement is terrific with the female voice adding depth to the male one on certain lines. Part way through, the track bursts into life with a fine guitar solo. The song's final instrumental flurry has a Spock's Beard feel to it.

'Every Minute' is a short instrumental piece with synths to the fore while 'Start Again' opens with a bass and drum refrain which is joined by a chiming guitar riff and then a solo. The initial male vocal reminds me of Dream Theater but again the use of the female vocal to take on the persona of a second character sets it apart. The guitar work is a delight throughout as is the retro synth solo.

'...True' is piano-based but with lovely accentuations from various instruments; it has a smooth Jazz-tinge and a memorable chorus. 'The Three Seers' is also led by a fine piano theme putting me in mind of the band Venice until the latter part when Keith Emerson-like piano virtuosity comes in to play.

The title track has a haunting double female vocal intro before a big riff charges into the picture. 'Can't Feel the Earth, Part IV' continues a theme established on the previous album while 'Illuminata' is another song that moves through various phases. Galgano's vocals are a little exposed on 'Sincerest Life' but the quality of the song wins through.

Gary Marshall

ETERNAL JOURNEY – 'NEBULAR' *(Independent)* PROGRESSIVE

Guitarist Alex Papatheodourou wants to produce something we haven't heard before. He hasn't really succeeded. This is mainly Prog Metal and all the stuff we expect, but with some oddities we wish we had more of.

More of 'The Entrance', soaring solo, off kilter keys, slow faux dramatic moments and galloping around, more of 'Nostalgia' and it magisterial moments and easy 1980's grace, piano to the fore and another sexy solo.

But less of the usual Prog Metal offers, 'Emptiness – Zero Gravity', 'Electric Heritage', 'Nebula: Movement III' and 'Promise And Demise' have only this really to tickle us.

Hands up if you know the names of five Prog Metal bands? See, there are five that people know and will probably check out before Eternal Journey. What does it profit you to follow this sound? They have lots of stuff in some of their songs, some that pleases, some that, as Niles Crane said about items in his muffin, I don't much care for.

But at least that's interesting; to stop this Journey from being more like a weekend trip to Pontins, Papatheodourou should do it more often...

Steve Swift

EUREKA MACHINES – 'BRAIN WAVES' *(Wrath)* HARD ROCK

There's a rumour going round that you don't actually know who Eureka Machines are, but of course with 'Brain Waves' being their fourth Power Punked punch of Pop, I know that's a ridiculous thought. I mean, who else has so many hooks squashed into their loud, proud rush of riffs and harmony vocals that you're almost tripping over yourself to join in? Which other band…? Yup, you're right, none. So prepare to be seduced by the surge of 'Human', the chant it, stomp it, chant it, romp it of 'Television' and the staccato insomnia of 'Sleep Deprivation'.

Add '...Waves' to your life and you'll find the plugged into the mains Rock 'n' Roll of 'Welcome To My Shangri-La' gnawing into the soft stuff in your head before jettisoning out of your mouth for days on end whereas 'The Golden Lonely' could only be catchier if it came with a baseball mitt! 'Neuro Bolero' fuses a scything swipe of glistening goody globules to a verse that bobs and weaves its attack into darting forays of fun while 'Every Day I Thank The World I Cut You Off' reveals a restrained side that EM have only previously hinted at, the effect all the more startling for the whip cracks of Power Pop which surround it.

However that doesn't stop 'We're Going To The Future' closing the album with a chorus which wraps you up in harmony goodness, coaxing you to let go of your worries and simply come along for the ride. Vitally, these bursts of happy good times come with an insightful, mature, thought provoking ethos which comments on the world round us without preaching; the hit of cracking choruses just as impactful with or without the messages to back them up.

If you really haven't heard Eureka Machines, you really need to experience 'Brain Waves'. If you can stop shouting the words and careening around the house to the insistent beats and rip-roaring guitars just long enough to do so, you'll thank me that you did.

Steven Reid

EXISTENCE – 'LIVE IN MONTREAL' *(Black Pearl)* PROGRESSIVE

Not to be confused with the German Power Metal band, the New Jersey Melodic Deathcore troupe or the French Metallers of the same name, this Existence are a five-piece Neo-Prog band from Quebec, about whom I know very little.

Internet details are also very sketchy, but I can glean that they're led by their only constant member Alan Charles (vocals, piano, guitar) and have been on hiatus since the release of their third full album 'Small People, Short Story, Little Crime' way back in 1999. To further confuse matters, this live album comes from a show that same year which was recently found on a mini-disc recorded by their sound engineer; at this point I'm not sure if it heralds new activity by the band or if it's just a posthumous release for their fans.

The good news is that this album sounds pretty good for its origins, with consummate performances from drummer Gerard Leveque, bassist Eric Martin, guitarist Gaston Gagnon and Charles himself on piano and understated vocals, although long periods of over half of these tracks are instrumental. Existence are mostly laid-back and every nuance of their atmospheric music can be clearly made out, from the technical precision of the rhythm section to every one of Gagnon's Dave Gilmour-esque picked notes and ringing chords, but the star of the show is violinist Francois Beaugard, whose every note is dripping with passion and skill.

Unfortunately some of their tunes are a bit uneventful, particularly opener 'No Hero' with its ill-fitting lyrics and the following discordant pseudo-instrumental 'The Journey', which actually has vocal sounds but no proper words. Much better are 'Rebirth' with its mid-song change of pace and the fifteen minute 'The Last Battle' which has the best vocals and sublime guitar and violin solos. The bass led 'Business As Usual' is a bit chunkier and 'Another Fine Day Of…' even has a guitar riff before settling back into a great mellow groove with smooth musicianship. Most of the twenty minute epic 'In The Kingdom Of Madness' is pretty neat too, particularly the stereo effects, although the bizarre avant-garde mid-section

did lose me for a couple of minutes.

I can't really say this album blew me away but I did find a few things to like, and as the band are obviously passionate about what they do/did, all I can do is wish them well.

Phil Ashcroft

F.M. – 'TRANSFORMATION' *(Cherry Red/Esoteric Antenna)* PROGRESSIVE

Hot on the heels of the re-issues of this Canadian Prog trio's first four studio albums and the release of a live album/DVD from their performance at Nearfest in 2006, band leader Cameron Hawkins has only gone and made good on his promise to release a new studio album, their first since 1987.

This particular F.M. formed in the mid-seventies and were notable for not having a guitarist, instead utilising (firstly) madcap violinist/mandolinist Nash The Slash alongside the more traditional bass, drums and keys, and then (latterly) Heart/Rush/K.D. Lang alumni Ben Mink in the same role. With Nash now sadly deceased and Mink otherwise successfully employed, original drummer Martin Deller is the latest to opt out, his place taken by ex-Kim Mitchell, Gowan, Roger Hodgson and Rik Emmett man Paul DeLong, whilst new members Aaron Solomon (violin, vocals) and Ed Bernard (violin, viola, mandolin, vocals) complete the line-up.

Jumping straight back into their eighties style of commercial songs with unorthodox instrumentation, 'Brave New Worlds' has a Folky vocal intro that leads into catchy melody lines and dark instrumentation that, at first, seems grating; it's a trait that's true for a few of the other tracks too. However, repeated plays reveal layers of tuneful violin and mandolin, orchestral arrangements, incredible drum patterns and Hawkins' inventive bass and smooth vocals. It does sound strange that most of the mandolin sounds are organic and not the overdriven and fuzzy electric sounds of old, plus there's a distinct lack of Hawkins' trademark synths on some tracks.

For his part DeLong is a revelation, effortlessly switching between signatures on otherwise catchy tunes like 'Cosmic Blue', 'Reboot Re-Awaken' and the simply wonderful ballad 'Safe And Sound', always playing the right thing for the song. Elsewhere 'Tour Of Duty' has melodic violin and mandolin over a busy drumbeat and killer bass line, and while a lot of its seven minute running time is instrumental, the song parts are simple and memorable.

Both the rhythmic 'The Love Bomb (Universal Love)' and the breezy 'Heaven On Earth' have Yes and Rush overtones and are pretty immediate, with only the processed vocals of the avant-garde 'Children Of Eve' and the sparse 'Soldiers Of Life' being too jerky and bizarre for their own good.

With a spacious self-produced sound and clear mix from the legendary Terry Brown, 'Transformation' will hopefully lead to continued activity and the band will make more great albums like this one.

Phil Ashcroft

FOUR STAR REVIVAL – 'KNIGHTS OF THE REVIVAL' *(Aztek)* HEAVY METAL

Four Star Revival are an American Power/Heavy Metal act that deliver everything that is suggested on the tin – super, soaring vocals courtesy of Jack Emrick, razor sharp guitar and a pounding rhythm section that comes at you like a herd of horses.

'Red' is a hard bruising statement that sets the tone for the whole album. If you are a fan of acts such as Primal Fear or even old-school legends Savatage, then there will be plenty on offer here to your liking. 'Faith' reminded me of former Iron Maiden man Blaze Bailey's solo work – hard hitting, old-school Metal with no thrills.

Guitarist Benny Bodine is a one-man-army of hard riffs and his work on 'Hold On' has many stand alone moments. He shows his versatility as he taps into a more commercial edge reminiscent of the Scorpions for 'Perfect Life'. 'Let Love' is a masterpiece of Power Metal with a terrific chorus that the late Ronnie James Dio would have been proud to have sung.

The band really strip away the crust during 'Broken Man', a chaotic yet keenly focused blend of razor sharp riffs which barely leaves you time to catch your breath.

FSR never try to emulate what has come before and take things in a new direction during 'Somewhere To Run To'; the acoustic guitars and the more commercial edge is not unlike some of Tyketto's work.

In short, Four Star Revival are clearly a band in need of some attention in the Metal world.

Ray Paul

GRUMPYNATORS – 'WONDERLAND' *(Target)* HARD ROCK

Sharing many traits with fellow countrymen Volbeat may just pique your interest in this unusually named band that features a double bass player rather than the traditional choice of an electric one.

The Volbeat connections don't stop at the blend of Metal and Rockabilly; guitarist Christian Norgaard featured as Volbeat's touring acoustic guitarist whilst the other band members supported Volbeat with the Neo-Rockabilly band Taggy Tones. The band's other claim to fame – although unrelated to Volbeat – is that it now features ex-Jackal drummer Per Fisker.

The main distinction between Volbeat and Grumpynators is that the latter do everything at speed; frantic riffing stands alongside clickety-click drumming and double bass swing on 'Walked Away', 'Mama No' and even the Motörhead-esque Metal of 'Pray For Your Life' but adds to it with their Rockabilly element.

It's effective, with the album (the band's debut) providing something different to the traditional Metal genre. Guitar solos are all present and correct and there's enough crunch to fuel a bowl of cornflakes but it's the original touch that turns this from a mediocre album into a good album one.

Mike Newdeck

HERCULES PROPAGANDA – 'SCREAM FOR ACTION' *(Mighty)* ROCK

I'm digging this; cool rhythms, a retro ramshackleness and sack loads of hip thrusting, "we're cool, you're not" attitude. But are they taking the piss? Really, in places, I'm guessing so. And this is the confusion Hercules Propaganda leaves you with.

Silly band name, album covers with chubby naked ladies sitting on the end of a knife and falsetto vocals that either make you cringe or laugh uncomfortably. We're talking tongue so far in cheek here that we all sound like Marlon Brando in 'The Godfather'. Or are we?

If you like The Datsuns, or hanker to howl with The Hives then there's absolutely no doubt that The Rolling Stones ethos, smothered in a pout of Punk, will appeal and yet in places Kiss are the strongest whiff in this pungent pot.

If, like me, the simplicity of the Paul Stanley/Gene Simmons starting point still makes you strut your deuce as you neck a cold gin, then the fiery Lo-Fi guitars will hit the spot. However, when Fritze decides to go all Justin Hawkins on us and reach for the ball-aching heights, the hoarse "I couldn't hit these notes if my life depends on it" strangulation which had my speakers cowering with a withered "really..?", are as baffling as they are "did that really make the cut?" funny.

Yet, huge swathes of 'Scream For Action' will have you believing Hercules Propaganda are the real, retro deal as Kiss meets The Hives in a way that might just take them to the Jools Holland's "we don't do Rock, unless it's kitsch" mainstream. So stupid in places is this HP sauce that you'll wonder exactly what the brown stuff that's coming out of the bottle is. Sometimes the aroma is so spicy you'll want to smother your bacon sandwich in it... on other occasions you can't quite resist the temptation to scrape it off the sole of your shoe.

Steven Reid

JADED STAR – 'MEMORIES FROM THE FUTURE' *(Sensory)* SYMPHONIC METAL

Jaded Star is a Female-Fronted Symphonic/Gothic Metal project featuring former Visions Of Atlantis leading lady Maxi Nil and drummer Raphael Saini, once a member of Iced Earth. The band is completed by guitarist Kosta Vreto (Horizon's End) and bass player Babis Nikou (Astral DNA, Opened Paradise). If I'm honest VOA never really got my juices flowing but after just a couple of plays of 'Memories From The Future', I was hooked! The JS style has more substance and certainly more power and these qualities generate more impact.

I'm reminded a lot of Stream Of Passion, though the song structures are less Progressive. I'm also reminded of the Beautiful Sin album from several years ago due to the dynamics of the arrangements and the direct approach but JS are by no means in the plagiarising game. The bulk of the material was written by Nil and Nikou and their writing ethic allows for the recognition of individual performances during the instantly memorable songs.

Saini's powerful drumming lays the foundations for some emotionally charged melodies and Vretos' guitar weaves in and out of the melody lines and assaults the senses with some crunching riffs. Nil's vocals are the best I have heard from her and she has the range to give the lyrics life, never over indulgent and always in the context of the song.

'The Mask' is a swaggering opener and contains a great hook amongst the subtle time changes and incendiary rhythms. 'Stars' features a great Vreto solo and some fantastic work by Saini; Nil's vocals merely add to the appeal. 'Healing The Inner Child' forges ahead with some more impressive performances, drums and guitars to the fore but it is never at the expense of the music.

Aside from 'Into The End Of Time' and 'In Memory', the songs are generally mid-tempo in pace yet there is never a feeling of repetition. The two ballads are perfect showcases for Nil's skills and her passionate delivery manages to convey some haunting imagery and beauty. Album closer 'Innocence' is the most up-tempo workout on 'Memories From The Future' and possibly the most commercial of the ten tracks on offer. The chorus resonates and the performances are once again top drawer. Nil's production along with the mastering work of Fredrik Nordstrom gives a full sound and played loud the album simply Rocks.

At forty-five minutes, the running time is perfect for me and though material of this nature is generally more epic in scope, the four and five minute length songs still provide plenty to sink the teeth into. It also means there is only one other thing to do... repeat play.

Dave Bott

HIGH ROAD EASY – 'III' *(Shore)* MELODIC ROCK

German duo of vocalist Jan Knopf and guitarist Sven Horlemann are High Road Easy and the imaginatively titled 'III' is their third collaboration. Previous reviews and descriptions given about this band indicate that they should be right up my street, but after giving the album a spin, I just don't hear many of these comparisons; they definitely lack the polished commerciality of many of the bands that others claim High Road Easy are akin to. They are very raw and have an unfinished quality to their overall production that is sparse and unadulterated, that puts them a million miles away from the highly polished and produced Def Leppard, Bon Jovi and Toto comparisons.

While they are without doubt a driven Melodic Hard Rock band, they have a rawer Hard Rock vibe and driven Rock and Roll energy than I would associate with your average Melodic Rock band. I just find the overall feel of 'III' to be undefined with lots of varying influences from Prog Rock structures to more standard Hard Rock punches to some Metallic guitar riffs and, to be honest, it doesn't always blend well for me and makes the album, at times, hard going.

It's not a bad album. I can't point out different flaws or specific problems that make that so, it is just very mediocre (to me) as it doesn't leave a lasting impression; it literally goes in one ear and out the other. There are some nice ideas that do stand out in a few songs which do indicate that, depending on an individual's own preferences, there is a lot to be enjoyed here. But for me, the consistently weak choruses make it an extremely forgettable album.

'III' feels very dry and undernourished, like a collection of works in progress, and the lack of any serious hooks only highlights this. There are some songs that do stand out; these are the mid-tempo Rocker 'Higher Ground', with its atmospheric vibe and cool vocal melodies, the "no nonsense" Rocker 'Haywire' due to its energetic guitar riff and 'Wings' which has some cool laid back keyboards during the verses and an effective atmospheric tone.

'III' is raw and dirty Melodic Rock and definitely not for people who like things highly polished and a production that has everything plus the kitchen sink thrown at it. But if you like things a little rawer, the driven guitar riffs and Rock 'n' Roll energy displayed here could possibly appeal to you.

Paul Woodward

HINDER – 'WHEN THE SMOKE CLEARS' *(The End)* MODERN/ALTERNATIVE

It's been difficult for Hinder recently. Predictably dropped by their label after the lacklustre 'Welcome To The Freakshow', the band then suffered the loss of vocalist Austin Winkler through an ongoing drug and alcohol problem.

Whilst Jared Weeks (Saving Abel) stepped into the fray to complete the tour, following a period of inactivity plus a failed experiment with Nashville-based Neal Nolan, Hinder finally opted for one time Faktion vocalist Marshal Dutton to fill the void. Dutton previously contributed to the song-writing and production of Hinder's most recent albums, striking up a rapport with drummer Cody Hanson in the process. A perfect fit then?

Hinder may not be to everyone's taste, being in the same genre as Nickelback; Winkler's vocals made them distinguishable from other like-minded Modern Rock bands. It's not that Dutton has a bad voice; it's just that it's anodyne and adds nothing notable to the songs that, in the main, are half decent.

The other surprise with this album is how bad the drum sound is considering that it's a drummer that produced it. Synthetic and robotic, it simply sounds like a glorified demo. Songs like opener 'Rather Hate Than Hurt' – a song written with Winkler in mind – is thin and seems like a left over from the previous album while 'Hit The Ground' is decent enough but lacks the kudos to elevate it above anything else. Likewise the ballads 'Foolish Eyes' and 'Letting Go' are reasonable "radio friendly" fodder but let down by weak production.

Hinder sound more comfortable cranking it up and yet the typically titled Hinder Rocker 'I Need Another Drink' or the thudding 'Nothing Left To Lose' – a song produced by Dutton and Hanson when it first appeared on the 9 Left Dead album 'The Wrong Things' in 2011 – lack that major label production that we are used to expecting with this style of music. Due to this, the album as a whole entity really can't hold a torch to the first two albums of the band or even the excellent 'All American Nightmare'.

It's unfair to say that this album is poor because with the input of a top name producer there's no doubt that this could have been way better given the reasonable set of songs. The elephant in the room on this album however is Dutton. Filling Winkler's shoes was always going to be difficult and yet the "in house" appointment sadly appears to have been nothing more than "the easy option" for a band that surely could have attracted someone with a little more vocal character and some well needed gravitas.

Mike Newdeck

HOLD – 'HOLD' *(Independent)* MODERN/ALTERNATIVE

HOLD (which is an acronym of the members' last names) are a self-professed "Indie band" on their Facebook page, but their sound is edgier and deeper than that description implies. The album is strung together along contemplative rhythms which Anthony Hurley presides over with loose but richly-toned vocals.

'You And I' opens with thick, crisp guitar, think Western-shoot-out tension building. Hurley does some of his best work on this opener, contrasting soft and thoughtful with a casual, more flamboyant style. This array of sounds is characteristic of HOLD throughout the whole album; it works great for a rhythmically unpredictable and tonally-full album but does sometimes leave any melody and hooks lacking.

'Still Waiting' brings a bit more of the energy we've been waiting for from the first three tracks. You'll be kept waiting a little longer though because the heavy guitar riff and drawn out vocals do little to keep this newfound spark alight. The rhythms get Funkier on the offbeat 'The Known Of Yesterday' with Pete Laramee going to town on the scales in the solo and bassist Dave DeMarco pulling some big bassy punches.

Despite this, it just doesn't seem to hang all that well together. Hurley's voice doesn't always seem to match the heavier guitar; take 'Valor' for example, where Hurley seems flat and two-dimensional in comparison to the snappy, spirited drumming and tight, overdriven guitar.

It's pretty hard to distinguish the songs as the album goes on, the guitar seemingly getting heavier, but still just as directionless and Hurley's vocals more pained and draining. Ironic that the penultimate track is 'Pain' before you reach 'Losing It' by which point I sort of was.

HOLD's self-titled album is deliberative and explorative and their writing reflects this; polyphonic rhythms develop unpredictably while solos meander, powerful guitar hooks pack a punch and some loose vocals cut across it all not really seeming to hold a note. The bare bones of some great tracks are there, they just lack the muscle to carry it off.

Sophie Brownlee

JOE SATRIANI – 'SHOCKWAVE SUPERNOVA' *(Sony/Legacy)* INSTRUMENTAL

It's hard to believe that this is Joe Satriani's fifteenth studio album, a pretty mean feat when you consider how different some of them have been to each other, and the fact that a vast majority of them have been all instrumental. Not only is he working with co-producer John Cuniberti on this one, he's also kept the members of his last touring band; bassist Bryan Beller, ace drummer Marco Minneman and keyboard/guitar virtuoso Mike Keneally along with the legendary Vinnie Colaiuta behind the kit for four numbers.

Like some of Satriani's best work, there's a lot of variety on 'Shockwave Supernova'; a myriad of different styles harking back to his 'Surfing With The Alien', 'Flying In A Blue Dream' and 'The Extremist' era. The most noticeable thing is the drumming, as none of the tunes Rock out to a standard beat, Minneman and Colaiuta inserting more feel and groove into Shuffle, Funk and Jazz rhythms. Satriani himself uses lots of different sounds so that no two tunes sound the same.

For instance, for all its trademark melodies and solos, 'Lost In A Memory' chugs along as a slow shuffle when a standard 4/4 would have given it a completely different feel. The gritty distortion of 'Shockwave Supernova' and the upbeat 'On Peregrine Wings' still Rock pretty well, and 'Cataclysmic' and 'A Phase I'm Going Through' fairly thud along on heavy bass riffs, whilst the cool 'In My Pocket' and light Boogie tune 'San Francisco Blue' are certainly more about the tune and atmosphere than any showing off.

Among the highlights are the quirky 'Crazy Joey' with its lazy groove and ridiculously fast arpeggios (think 'The Mystical Potato Head Groove Thing' on acid!), Keneally's great piano and Satriani's solos on the fabulous 'Keep On Movin'' and the tuneful melodies of 'All Of My Life'. At the other end of the spectrum, the beautiful interlude 'Butterfly And Zebra', the mellow 'Stars Race Across The Sky' and the atmospheric 'Goodbye Supernova' are amongst the best low-key tunes he's ever written.

It's unusual for an album with fifteen tracks to have no real dips in quality, some of the tunes are immediate, others require several plays to reveal the layers of arrangements and take in what the other musicians are doing beneath Joe Satriani's impeccable playing. He and Cuniberti have also done an exemplary job on the production and mixing, with everything clearly audible and the album having a great sound on speakers, headphones and even iPod.

Looks like the world's most commercially successful instrumental guitarist will continue to hold that position for quite a while yet.

Phil Ashcroft

HOLLOW HAZE – 'MEMORIES OF AN ANCIENT TIME' *(Scarlet)* POWER METAL

It's a problem many bands have faced... how do you replace a fantastic singer known for their power and presence without losing your identity? In the case of Hollow Haze, the answer is you don't, you replace him, Fabio Lione (Rhapsody Of Fire/Angra), with FIVE fantastic singers and to hang with continuity! It's a brave move and braver still when you realise two of the new voices are female, meaning the HH sound really has really moved on from their previous album, 'Countdown To Revenge'.

So who are these fresh talents? Well on the female side we are treated to contributions from Amanda Somerville (Kiske-Somerville/Avantasia) and Claudia Layline (Serenade), while the hat-trick of males are Mats Leven (Therion/Yngwie), Ivan Giannini (Derdian) and Rick Altzi (Masterplan) – yes, we're talking serious firepower here! And it's put to good use, the quintet are given time to shine in their own right and plenty of opportunity to bounce vocal ideas and approaches off each other along the way.

However, let's not forget that this isn't just a singing convention, it's a HH album and a damn fine one it is too. The second in a trilogy which started with 'Countdown...', 'Memories Of An Ancient Time' is bristling Power Metal with bags of melody and a few Progressive moments, reminding me of Avantasia visiting the land of Kamelot.

If that isn't a fine starting point, then I'm not sure what is; across emotional emanations such as 'Gate To The Eternity', the hammer smashes and Operatic vocals of 'Silvertown' and the atmospheric build into confident Melodic Metal of 'Eyes Of The Sphinx', not a moment is wasted. Grandiose themes are expounded with a real eye for precise power.

All the while, the theatrical side of what HH provide adds another dimension; 'Rain Of Fire Lights' raised from standard galloping romp into a tale of real potency and 'Created To Live' a sing along of ridiculous proportions where you'll find yourself howling out "life and death were written by the aliens, for the aliens..." over and over, much to the amazement of those around you!

Many bands crumble at the prospect of finding a new vocal-focal point for their music. With 'Memories Of An Ancient Time', Hollow Haze have used it to expand their sound and expertly further their cause.

Steven Reid

HOLLOWMIND – 'THE CARDINAL FACTOR' *(Die Hard)* PROGRESSIVE

Seven years to the day after the release of their debut album 'Soundscape Of Emotions', Brazilian Progressive Metal trio Hollowmind are back with a concept album that coincidentally looks at the cycle of life through the symbolism of cardinal numbers.

Describing themselves as an amalgam of influences from their favourite bands – Fates Warning, Queensrÿche and Rush – bassist/singer Robert Gutierrez, guitarist Alexandre Silviera and drummer Felipe Gomes are certainly ambitious, with a definite similarity to FW at least, even if I don't hear much of the other two.

Dark riffs juxtapose with light vocal melodies on songs with an endearing lack of overdubs, making the organic sound of the dynamic 'Bitter Words' and heavier fare like 'Haven' and 'A Momentary Lapse Of Treason' all the more unique.

As well as writing the songs and possessing a decent, almost accent-less high tenor, Gutierrez is also a damn fine bass player and adds something extra to the two nine minute epics 'Under Fading Lights' and the album highlight 'Ashes Of Yesteryear'. The latter is a great mix of well thought out riffs, memorable vocal melodies and a nice acoustic bit in the middle that does actually remind me of Rush for once.

I would also suggest that some of the lighter and more accessible songs like 'Even Shares Of Gold' and 'The Crossing' have more than a hint of Coheed & Cambria in their construction and vocal. Opener 'Nonsense Of Belonging' contains everything they're about whilst the Folky 'On The Wings Of Ruin' is the curve ball.

Well produced, mixed and mastered – the latter by Angra alumni Brendan Duffey, the man responsible for fellow Brazilians Vivalma that I lauded in these very pages back in issue #64 – 'The Cardinal Factor' is a little too left-field to be for everybody, but if you like a bit of light and shade and a lot of thought, this album may well be something you'll enjoy.

Phil Ashcroft

ILIUM – 'MY MISANTHROPIA' *(Nightmare)* POWER METAL

The genesis of Australian's Ilium (originally called Iliad) can be traced back as far as 1998 when two members from the band Oracle left to develop their own brand of Power Metal. Since 2002, they have consistently released an album roughly every two years with latest, 'My Misanthropia' representing album number seven in their discography; it is also the only one to break the two year release cycle since four years has passed since 2011's 'Genetic Memory.'

These veterans of the scene have delivered another album that features all the classic elements expected for this style; soaring vocals, bombastic drumming, breakneck tempos and copious amounts of harmonized guitars. The album is remarkably consistent, as every track carries equal weight allowing the songs to work together as a collective.

The track lengths remain rather conservative (averaging four to five minutes) throughout and therefore never have an opportunity to journey into the dubious land of self-indulgence. This compositional brevity gives great momentum to the album's flow.

It was nothing short of surprising to learn the band is in fact a trio featuring guitarist Jason

Hodges, vocalist Lance King and multi-instrumentalist Adam Smith. Smith's contribution is impressive to say the least as he performs guitar, drums, bass AND keyboards! King's timbre is very reminiscent of James LaBrie (Dream Theater), yet keeps his upper register in check, making for a well-balanced delivery that never fatigues.

Ilium continues the tradition set into motion by the legendary German acts Accept and Helloween and reinvigorated by the likes of Stratovarious, Blind Guardian and Firewind. Considering the wealth of music available by other stylistically similar bands, a few unexpected twists would help set Ilium's latest effort apart from the rest of the pack. However, it is this very traditional interpretation of the style that makes this album stand proudly amongst its peers.

Not only will existing fans of Power Metal be able to satiate their voracious musical appetites with 'My Misanthropia', those listeners who might want to investigate this genre would find a solid first footing with Ilium.

Brent Rusche

IRON SAVIOR – 'LIVE AT THE FINAL FRONTIER' *(AFM)* POWER METAL

Whilst Helloween, and its spin off Gamma Ray, undoubtedly kept the flame alive in the early 1990s, the resurgence of dynamic Power Metal as a vibrant force in Europe can largely be credited to two bands – HammerFall and Iron Savior. Yet, the contrasting fortunes of the two bands are, in many ways, rather curious. That's not to say that IS haven't had their successes, but in reality after a promising start that saw them trade blows like equals, the mighty Swede's have surged ahead in the popularity (and sales) stakes. Musically speaking however, in my humble opinion at least, Piet Sielck's men have always had the edge.

After twenty years in the business, eight studio albums and the recent re-working of their 2007 opus 'Megatropolis' (retitled 'Megatropolis 2.0' as per the dictate of modern fashion), IS have finally gotten around to releasing their first ever live recording. Released as an exclusive DVD/2CD package, 'Live At The Final Frontier' captures the band in their home town of Hamburg earlier this year; for the curious amongst you who have often wondered what all the fuss was about, it should provide the answers to one or two burning questions.

Like most modern concert DVD's, the camera work is proficient yet clinical, and whilst it does give you a flavour of what it was like to be in the crowd that night, it's still no substitute for the real thing and after a while tends to get rather routine and dull. The soundtrack however is a completely different kettle of fish… close your eyes, settle back and let the band guide your imagination back to what it's really like to be in the thick of it at a full-on Metal show.

As the intro 'Ascendence' kicks in, the crowd seem rather muted at first as if surprised by the show actually starting, but as the crescendo builds and first song proper ('Last Hero') comes roaring through the PA, you instinctively know that is all about to change. Cut from the same cloth as aforementioned behemoths Helloween and GR (with maybe even a bit of Blind Guardian thrown into the mix as well from time to time), IS are bloody good at what they do and cherry picking some of the best tracks from their expansive back catalogue serves only to reinforce that.

'Starlight', 'Revenge Of The Bride' and the Accept meets Judas Priest-like 'Break The Curse' all fly by in a frenzied blur of riffs and anguished vocals – exactly what you'd want from a band of this calibre. The in-between-song audience interaction and announcements are largely in German (natch), but that doesn't detract one iota from an increasingly engaging performance characterised by Iron Savior classics 'Hall Of The Heroes', 'Condition Red' and 'Coming Home'. The condensed 'Iron Watcher' medley works extremely well, and as a fitting tribute to their heroes the evening ends on a rousing cover of 'Breaking The Law'.

German engineering at its best…"vorsprung durch technik" indeed!

Dave Cockett

KARNATAKA – 'SECRETS OF ANGELS' *(Gonzo/Immrama)* PROGRESSIVE

Having, on many a day, been caught spellbound by their previous album 'The Gathering Light', the return of Karnataka with 'Secrets Of Angels' has been long anticipated by this particular scribbler. However, while '...Light's mixture of crunching guitars and soaring melodies, beautiful intricacies and drop dead vocals started the band down a more exuberant, confident and assured path than their three earlier albums, interestingly '...Angels' is more of a slower burn.

This is a beast willing to give up its treasures, but only at the pace and style it chooses – nuggets and trinkets of pleasure and excitement carefully placed in hidden compartments of the listener's mind to allow repeat visits to glow and shimmer in a way not initially alluded to.

Hayley Griffiths, who makes her Karnataka recording debut here, takes the role as focal point with ease; this lady with the powerful voice is "oh so comfortable" with the spotlight thrust firmly upon her. However without material worthy of her talents, the effect would be diminished to insignificance; that Karnataka have stepped up to the mark in what can best be described as quite outstanding fashion, is to their credit.

The effect is sumptuous, strings (provided by talented violinists, violists, cellists and harpists alongside the close your eyes and he's sure to appear pipes and whistle man Troy Donockley), unravelling a sound built round a Symphonic/Folk base, yet one which is raised and nurtured by the subtly stinging guitar work of Enrico Pinna and keyboards of Cagri Tozluoglu. However '...Angels' isn't some Folk-Prog retread or a Nightwished stab at Symphonic Metal.

Instead 'Because Of You' is shaped into an engaging, rounded tale of deceiving partners wrapped in varying musical attacks – one moment dartingly elusive, the next confidently boisterous whilst 'Borderline' is an assured swagger of bombast which is controlled to such an extent that it never even hints at the overbearing fare so many attempting this style bluster upon.

'Fairytale Lies' proves this incarnation of Karnataka are equally adept at turning their hand to intimate heart-tuggings, although it is the album's seven part title track which best illustrates the outstanding arrangements each song possesses; ever varying attacks interspersed with emotional asides and splashes of colour which together create a hugely individual piece.

Unfortunately 'Feels Like Home' holds the album back ever so slightly by stumbling unintentionally into an unwelcome "Disney Princess" vibe through its staccato/busy lyric and overly sentimental arrangements, however this slight misjudgement is the only vague misstep anywhere on an album which is otherwise verging on utter triumph. The 'Secrets Of Angels' should be proclaimed loud and proud for all to hear!

Steven Reid

JARED JAMES NICHOLS – 'OLD GLORY AND THE WILD REVIVAL' *(Listenable)* BLUES/SOUL

Every few years, the Blues throws up a new precocious talent, playing with a depth of feeling for the Blues that belies their young age. We've had the likes of Kenny Wayne Shepherd and Jonny Lang from the U.S. and from the U.K., more recently, there's been the prodigious young talents of Oli Brown, Ansley Lister and Joanne Shaw Taylor. The newest recruit to this list is Jared James Nichols.

Originally from Wisconsin, but now based in L.A., Nichols' debut is fully-formed with a style of Blues Rock that you can sink your teeth into with a grittier appeal than, say, Joe Bonamassa. The riffs are thick and Nichols' finger picking style helps make for some combustible soloing.

On 'Playin' For Keeps' the solo is bound for space with the same wild, thrilling power of Jimi Hendrix. His guitar playing isn't the only draw here, his voice is great too. Singing out of necessity originally, his voice has developed into a great instrument in its own right. Like his guitar playing, his vocals are about feel and tone.

Some Blues artists can have backing bands that are a little pedestrian supporting them, but the Swedish duo of Erik Sandin on bass and Dennis Holm on drums make this band a formidable power trio. The legendary Eddie Kramer, who's worked with Led Zeppelin and The Rolling Stones, along with engineer Warren Huart (Aerosmith) create a vibrant production sound that lifts this above many Blues releases.

There are Heavy Blues Rock tunes like 'Crazy', the Funky 'Haywire' and the Southern fried 'Sometimes'. 'Blackfoot' and 'Playin'...' even Rock hard enough to appeal to fans of the likes of Black Stone Cherry or Virgil And The Accelerators. When Nichols swaps his electric guitar for acoustic, as he does on 'Now Or Never' and the Robert Johnson cover 'Come In My Kitchen', he's just as good.

Two live tracks are added as a bonus and the live rawness demonstrates that Jared James Nichols is the real deal.

Duncan Jamieson

JESSICA'S THEME BAND – 'MATTER OF TIME' *(Independent)* ROCK

The imaginatively titled Jessica's Theme Band were originally formed in Athens, way back in 1989 by Jim Karahontzitis (guitar), John Goudoulas (vocals) and Nick Agathos (guitar). They disbanded in 1994, due to the classic "musical differences" before reuniting again in 2013 to record their stunning debut album, the aptly named 'Matter Of Time'. The music is a blend of Classic Rock (Bad Company, Thin Lizzy), Blues and Southern Rock (The Allman Brothers Band) with a pinch of Country thrown in for good measure.

'Matter...' has a real seventies vibe but with modern production techniques, courtesy of sound engineer and co-producer Sofoklis Pappas, that never sounds dated. The mix on this release is absolutely fantastic with the rhythm section of Denis Kaskouras (bass) and Tony Linaris (drums) being very prominent but never overshadowing the glorious guitars of Karahontzitis and Agathos. There is a nice natural groove to the whole album assisted by the smooth, relaxing vocal delivery of Goudoulas whom, I would hazard a guess, learnt his English from an American as there is only a very tiny trace of an accent.

'Big Story' sets out the stall and showcases the quality of the musicianship by these "obviously seasoned" session players. The song sounds like it originated from a jam session before being developed into the fine, finished article. The infectious groove continues with the Blues Boogie of 'Black Cat' whilst songs like 'Everything Goes' and 'Hold On Tight' have a real cool vibe.

'Hard To Be A Hero' (which also features Bob Katsionis on keyboards) and the title track 'Matter Of Time', one of the heaviest tracks on the album, sound similar to The Nut Drivers ('Crazy Locomotion' being the very first album that I reviewed for Fireworks). 'It Happened Again' just oozes class as does the beautiful ballad 'My Faith In You' that brings to mind the likes of Bruce Hornsby And The Range. The old adage is "save the best until last" and Jessica's Theme Band have done just that with the classy Blues/Jazz of 'Station To Station' which could easily have been the theme tune to an old classic seventies TV show.

'Matter Of Time' might have been twenty-five years in the making, but it was well worth the wait and sounds like an unearthed or re-released classic from the seventies.

Mark Donnelly

JOSH TAERK – 'HERE'S TO CHANGE' *(Misty Creek)* ROCK

Having enjoyed and reviewed Canadian singer and song-writer Josh Taerk's first album a while back, I was looking forward to this one. I noted the Bruce Springsteen vibe on the largely acoustic numbers on the debut; this is still the case on his new album but the resemblance now stretches to the Rock territory.

Jumping to track five, 'Take A Chance With Me', I am not sure whether it's a shameless homage or Taerk's own style but in terms of the subject matter, energy and musicality, it comes over as a cross between 'Rosalita' and 'Thunder Road'. It really works and it is credit to his genuine heartfelt delivery that it sounds exciting but also valid by today's standards.

E Street band drummer Max Weinberg has already picked out Taerk as one to watch and adding to his patron list is John Oates (Hall & Oates); Oates even sings on the opening title track and 'Wise Man'.

Reading the PR release, Taerk wanted to make an evocative album in tune with 1970's and 1980's Rock music and the artists that have inspired him to play and write music – these include the aforementioned Springsteen, Tom Petty and Neil Young. If you like this type of music, it is fair to say you will enjoy this album.

This is more of a band oriented album rather than the solo-ish first album and there are some catchy standout tracks – 'The Mirror' has a very emotive and strong chorus and 'Waiting For The Flood' is another track that also happens to have a strong Springsteen influence (musically as well as the reference to a "flood").

Josh Taerk has raised the bar further on this second album and armed with his strong

Nashville touring band, he will make a considerable mark on the live circuit with this collection of songs.

Rob McKenzie

KAMCHATKA – 'LONG ROAD MADE OF GOLD' *(Despotz)* MODERN/ALTERNATIVE

This is the sixth studio album from Swedish Blues Rock trio Kamchatka. 'Long Road Made Of Gold' was recorded in the band's own studio and rehearsal room and has been mixed by Russ Russell (Napalm Death, Dimmu Borgir). This three-piece act consists of Per Wiberg (bass/vocals), Tobias Strandvik (drums) and Thomas "Juneor" Andersson (guitar/vocals).

The music is a hearty mix of Grunge and Blues with some mean Metal riffs thrown in for good measure. 'Take Me Back Home' is a dense and grubby "no nonsense" Rocker with some fine musical passages whilst Bar Room Boogie is the name of the game for 'Get Your Game On' – it's well played but hardly adventurous.

Both 'Rain' and 'Mirror' also follow a standard Blues Rock formula but sadly never really break free of the shackles. The influence of Alice In Chains is all over 'Who's To Blame' and this takes the band into new territories which I quite enjoyed.

'Human Dynamo' has plenty of groove amongst the anger-tinged vocals and guitar; it is one that is very dynamic in its delivery. There's big slabs of concrete riffs are all over 'Slowly Drifting Away' which is a song which has few surprises but ticks the right box for thuggish charm.

Karmchatka have a blunt fashion to their musical delivery which seems to work well for them.

Ray Paul

KING KING – 'REACHING FOR THE LIGHT' *(Manhaton)* ROCK

The third album from the Glasgow-based Blues Rockers King King, 'Reaching For The Light' looks to capitalise on the massive strides they have made in their five year lifespan. Bagging no less than five victories, including 'Best Band' at the British Blues Awards last year (the third time they had won such an award), it's important that a new album keeps that standard high. Fortunately, it does just that.

'Hurricane' is a blistering opener with a relentless riff, marvellous keyboards and thumping bass and drums. Vocalist (and guitarist) Alan Nimmo has the perfect voice for this energetic Blues Rock and he is equally at home on the slower 'You Stopped The Rain'. The musicianship of his band mates (Lindsay Coulson on bass, Wayne Proctor on drums and Bob Fridzema on keyboards) is top notch as they are all seasoned players and it shows. This is not an album that required much studio tweaking, this is a collection of excellent musicians doing what they love.

'Waking Up' is a cracking example of how good the current British Blues scene is, while 'Rush Hour' could easily be the sort of thing Bad Company would be happy to have in their canon. 'Crazy' sees Nimmo deliver a very Paul Rodgers-like vocal and the song itself is very much the kind of track that the voice of Free would be comfortable delivering.

'Lay With Me' also mines the same vein, while 'Just A Little Lie' has a Funky Clav line. The production is first rate with everything clear and crisp. There are nine songs in total, all top notch, making for an excellent, well balanced album.

If you enjoy Blues Rock, and especially if you are into what Rodgers has released during his storied career, you might find King King a very worth companion. Excellent!

James Gaden

LEATHER BOYS – 'BACK IN THE STREETS' *(Rock*CD)* HARD ROCK

You will not be surprised to learn that Spanish band Leather Boys pedal a style of Glam/Sleaze Hard Rock reminiscent of Tigertailz, Pretty Boy Floyd and Michael Monroe where attitude appears to be just as important as the music itself. Just look at the band member's names; Leather Rose (vocalist), Leather Sex (guitarist), Leather Dangerous Dick (guitarist) (stated as Leather Dirty Duke on their Facebook page), Leather Bluesman (bass) and Leather Preacher (drums) to highlight said point.

The genre of music could also be deducted from many of the song titles like 'Hard Sex Girl', 'Lord Of The Whores' and the over the top 'Sexagenary Sex'. 'Back In The Streets' is the sophomore release following on from 2011's debut 'Real Leather'. The album was recorded last summer at ACME Studios (Avilés, Asturias, Spain) and has a punchy production from Spanish producer Miguel Herrero.

If I had completed my review of 'Back…' after only half a dozen listens then it would have been somewhat different to my final version. You see, this album has the aforementioned attitude in spades but the songs are certainly not instantaneous on the memory and require multiple listens to permeate under your skin. Add to the latter the gruff, Punk-style delivery of Rose's vocals and I certainly felt I had my work cut out providing a positive review. It may also be a little unfair to LB in that I always use Mötley Crüe's 'Too Fast For Love' (ironically originally released on Leathur Records) as the yardstick for this type of music.

The album opens with the first single 'Leather Gunner' which the band also shot a video for featuring pole dancer Daniella Berluchi and featuring guest vocalist Flichy Hickock (Fago Cowboys). Repeated listens do reveal some cool riffs and melodies such as those found in 'The Best', 'Cries In The Night' and 'Sweet Revelation'. 'Heart Of Stone' is a raucous ballad whilst 'Rock And Roll Gets Me High' features saxophonist Juan Flores from Ilegales and as such has a MM feel to it. 'Riding, Fighting & Drinking' does plod a little and is juxtaposed to the much faster 'Backstabber' with its gang backing vocals. The album concludes with the fine ballad 'Butterfly Wings' featuring guest vocalist Laura Gonzalez (Kwen, she also appears on '…Girl' and '…Whores) although the tune is somewhat at odds with the style of the rest of the album.

As mentioned, the album has attitude – indeed more attitude than an Essex girls' hen night party – but probably has limited crossover appeal to anyone outside the Sleaze/Glam Rock genre.

Mark Donnelly

LEPROUS – 'THE CONGREGATION' *(InsideOut)* PROGRESSIVE

They say you should never judge a book by its cover, although there are exceptions and this is one of them. The bleak and stark image of a skeleton of unknown origin, twisted and half buried, grey and crumbling, disturbing and unsettling, adorns the cover (if that's the right phrase) of this release. A portent of what the music is about to reveal? Maybe.

The Norwegian quartet often get painted with the Progressive brush but maybe not Prog in its strictest sense; they seem more modern and clean which labels it Nu-Prog or that term which was used back in the eighties when the genre was starting a renaissance… Neo-Prog.

A couple of years on from their last album 'Coal', it seems almost too perfect to bring up the old adage about coal turning to diamonds, yet the band have openly admitted that they have plainly worked their socks off to make the new record as good as it can get. As for the music, it could well be classed as diamond-like in the way it has a feel of being harsh and edgy, yet uncluttered and clear. It is all topped off with Einar Solberg's distinctive quivering and vaguely Operatic tones; it portrays the whole sense of something Muse-like and cutting edge although without the mass appeal.

In terms of the songs, the first "biggy" comes with 'The Flood'; almost eight minutes of repetitive Industrial noise of guitar and cries of drowning anguish. Yet you can sense there's been some thought in the track sequencing, which comes into its own as the first half acts as a warm up for a second half of the album which really takes off and sets the bar. The build up from the bleakness of 'Red' all bubbling synths and bass lines, in to 'Slave' and its anguished lyric of "make your move, end it all" that then leads to a compelling closing trio of 'Moon', 'Down' and 'Lower' which are as intense a finale as you'll get from Leprous.

Lyrically the album offers up something dense and dark which leaves plenty to explore and interpret yet based around the dangers and consequences of blind faith and following the flow. Solberg's vocals might grate with some; he's not a Rock vocalist in the classic or traditional sense yet, like the music, adds a diverse and daring dimension on what is a white knuckle ride of a journey.

Ultimately, this may be the album which sees Leprous tapping on the shoulders of the likes of Anathema and their peers. They have sweated blood to turn the vision into reality and have ultimately executed a very impressive and classy piece of work.

Mike Ainscoe

LOTTA LENE – 'SMOKE AND MIRRORS' *(Independent)* MELODIC ROCK

Ladies and Gentlemen, please allow me to introduce Lotta Lene; a young vocalist from Finland who I'm sure you will all be glad to get acquainted with because, after you get to hear her sing on her fabulous debut album 'Smoke And Mirrors', I suspect (just like me), you will also be smitten.

Lene, along with her fellow collaborator Jake Makela (who plays all the instruments), has, to my ears, made an album with some of the best Melodic Rock/AOR that has surfaced so far this year. Musically 'Smoke…' is of the highest quality and if you're a fan of wonderful female singers like Robin Beck, Darby Mills, Pat Benatar and Leigh Matty, then you could do little wrong in grabbing a copy of this album as soon as possible.

As soon as you press play, you be able to revel in a voice that has the depth, power and passion needed to carry Melodic Hard Rock to the highest of peaks and when this voice is joined with songs as strong as opener 'What I Want', which is all swagger and balls with a guitar solo to marvel at, you will soon find out for yourselves why I rate Lene so highly.

Lene and Makela then hit us with the stunning 'Seven Days' which brims with class and 'Stay', a song so beautifully arranged and performed by the two artists that each and every time I've played it, it has made the hairs on the back of my neck stand up. The album also features 'Skin', a stylish take on Melodic AOR with a big "chip on the shoulder" attitude and an immense hook; this song just Rocks.

'Promises' is a romper-stomper of a song with some more great performances and a chorus that sticks like glue to your brain. The proceedings are closed out by 'Riding Shotgun' and 'Here And Now', the first a swaggering Bluesy workout with guts whilst the second is a Country-ish Rock ballad with some lovely guitar work. These two songs also provide solid evidence that Lene isn't just your straight ahead Melodic Rock singer, but instead one who is versatile and talented enough to change vocal styles to suit the mood of the songs she is singing.

'Smoke And Mirrors' is the kind of album that makes what I do for Fireworks a joy; the kind of release that immediately makes you sit up and take notice. It also lets you know that there is a bright future for Melodic Rock/AOR and that it is in very safe hands; essential!

Ian Johnson

LIONCAGE – 'DONE AT LAST' *(Escape)* MELODIC ROCK

Lioncage are a three-piece band hailing from Germany that is made up of Torsten Landsberger on drums, Lars Konig on guitars and Thorsten Bertermann handling the vocals. They straddle a line between traditional AOR, Melodic Rock and perhaps even the higher precision AOR bands such as Toto.

The band has delivered a solid body of songs that never stray too far from the formula, but what does impress is the consistent high quality of the musicianship on the album. There are plenty of guests involved but one noticeable addition in that department is the involvement of Olaf Senkbeil who people may remember as the lead singer of Dreamtide (remember those three albums between 2001 and 2008 featuring Helge Engelke and C.C. Behrens from Fair Warning?).

'Mission Of Love' kicks the album off in fine style, setting the stall out for the remainder of the album. The bass driven 'Stay' is complimented by some seriously fine guitar work from Konig (I assume) and 'Dancing Queen' – no not the Abba super hit – is a cracking little tune featuring some cool time changes and rhythms as well as relying on classical guitar to get the message across. 'Where Do We Go' is also well worth a mention, with some wonderful harmonies from the ladies.

All in all Lioncage have done a very commendable job in delivering a very high quality album. If I were to have any form of slight reservation, it is that the vocals of Bertermann may be something of an acquired taste to some. That's not to say his delivery is poor, far from it, it's more a case of his distinctive voice may not appeal to everyone, which would be a shame.

After repeated plays, this album becomes a familiar friend; be sure to afford yourself the opportunity to hit the repeat button in order to fully appreciate this release's many wonderful layers.

Kieran Dargan

LONGREEF – 'BATTLE PLAN' *(Independent)* MODERN/ALTERNATIVE

Every so often you get something to review that takes you completely by surprise, almost knocking you over with its sheer class; Longreef's 'Battle Plan' is one such album.

Hailing from Sydney, Australia, Longreef don't conform to the stereotypes of Aussie Rock, preferring instead to dabble in the more Modern/Alternative end of the Melodic Rock spectrum. They've already released two EP's and toured with the likes of Fuel, Sick Puppies and Hoobastank so it perhaps shouldn't be a surprise that their star is on the rise.

There's two reasons why this album should be on your "to buy" list. Firstly the quality of the songs on offer, be it the chant along Melodic Rock of the title track, the heart melting acoustic gentleness of 'Sweet Emotion' (which is brilliantly sung by Josh Barker) or the brilliance of 'Want Me Back'. It's all of such a high quality that you'll have a new favourite each time you play it and believe me, you will want to play it repeatedly.

The second reason for falling in love with this compelling album is Barker's spellbinding vocal performance; singing with great soul and feeling throughout the twelve songs. Of particular note are opener 'The Fuse' which is about as close as it gets to the likes of Airbourne and AC/DC, the Alternative Rock/chant-along classic hybrid title track or the groove-orientated 'Walk On'. The album has single material too in the shape of the aforementioned '...Back' or the Nickelback lyricism of 'She Likes The Ladies'.

Being from Australia this probably won't get the exposure it deserves. But my advice for a band with an album of such high quality as this would be to make like the SP and up sticks, move to America and take things up to another level.

Longreef is an exceptional band that deserves your attention.

Mike Newdeck

LUNDEN REIGN – 'AMERICAN STRANGER' *(Cleopatra)* MODERN/ALTERNATIVE

Lunden Reign is an L.A.-based Female-Fronted Modern Rock project that came to life in 2013. It is primarily Nikki Lunden (lead vocals, bass, keyboards) and Lora G Espinoza-Lunden (guitar/keyboards) but sadly there is nothing in the bio to confirm who else, aside from producer Luis Maldonado, has taken part in the actual creation of the album or who completes the live line-up. That said, Facebook indicates that Matthew Denis (bass), Steve Ornest (guitar) and Morgan Young (drums) are involved in some capacity.

Based on the cover artwork, I was expecting something more in the Symphonic Metal vein so was pleasantly surprised when opening track 'Love In Free Fall' came blasting through the speakers. The style is very commercial Modern Rock that has a strong 1980's flavour, almost like a blast from the past with a contemporary edge. 'The Savage Line' has a hook right out of the AOR song-writing manual and there is also a nice use of violin during the verse passage. 'Hush And Whispers' drives along on the back of a strong riff and has an anthemic arrangement that breaks down mid-song before the infectious hook catches hold again. It feels at times as though Nikki Lunden is holding back a little and it would have been good to hear her really push herself during the songs when the music impacts with more power.

'28IF (Without, Which Not)' contains some sultry and smokey vocals and as the chorus approaches the sexiness in Nikki Lunden's voice is very appealing. The title track has a quirky melody line running through it and it is an imaginative variation on a tried and trusted theme. 'Mary' could have a come from any one of Heart's 1970's albums and this is complimented by 'The Light', a trippy retro number with a Led Zepplin-like riff at its core. The rawness of the production gives the impression of a band playing live in the studio and I'd be interested to discover just how '...Stranger' was created during a recording process that took place in Hollywood, London and L.A.

There is an air of familiarity and nostalgia about Lunden Reign that is both comforting and admirable yet it never feels anything but relevant. The writing is creative and the performances are really good and the overall vibe is both uplifting and addictive. 'American Stranger' is a great start to what should, hopefully, prove to be a productive career.

Dave Bott

MANIGANCE – 'VOLTE-FACE' *(Verycords)* PROGRESSIVE

I personally believe that language should never be a barrier or hindrance when listening to great music. Does it matter if the song is sung in English, German, Spanish or in this case French? Not really and as long as the song/album is good then that should, I personally think, be enough?

Manigance are French and have sung in their native tongue since their debut album 'Ange Ou Demon' came out thirteen years ago and I have been a huge fan of their work ever since. The band play a very melodic version of Progressive Power Metal and remind you at times of the mighty Vanden Plas, Evergrey and Symphony X. Singing as they do in their native tongue gives them an edge (an edge that others might not have) and the passion-filled vocal delivery of Didier Delsaux can be heard in each word that he sings (regardless of whether you can understand him or not).

For example, take the opening trio of 'Pur Sange', 'Leader' and 'Le Cote Sombre', three songs that are full of dynamic musicianship, blistering guitar solos and sweeping keyboards. As you listen, it doesn't matter if the lyrics are understood or not because the music itself is of the highest quality, and even though you might not understand what's being said, you can understand the passion and emotion with which it's delivered.

Following these, check out title cut 'Volte-Face', a mid-paced Rocker with some more stellar guitar work from Francois Merle and Bruno Ramos. This is a song chock full of melody and it sums up just what Manigance are all about in one fell swoop. 'Sans Relache' builds slowly from a vocal accompanied solely by acoustic guitar until the rest of the band blast in. Led by the explosive keyboards of Jean Lahargue, the song then gallops along at a rapid pace, driven by the vocals of Delsaux who is a commanding presence throughout. That still leaves 'Le Mirage', which is a joyous three minute romp full of aggressive guitar riffs, powerful drums and bass, and 'Parjure' where, once again, those impressive vocals vie with the other instruments for supremacy.

Manigance are a great band with a lot to offer and they should not be overlooked by anyone just because they have chosen to sing in their own language. Their skill at writing great Melodic Prog Metal songs should outweigh any bias you might have. Instead you will, if you give them a chance, find yourself enjoying one of the really great Metal bands working today.

Ian Johnson

LUCA TURILLI'S RHAPSODY – 'PROMETHEUS: SYMPHONIA IGNIS DIVINUS' *(Nuclear Blast)* POWER METAL

Music doesn't get any more bombastic and grandiose than Luca Turilli's Rhapsody. His creative juices are not so much flowing as creating a tsunami here. If you're not keen on genre labels look away now as Rhapsody's music has been termed (by the band) in their evolution as Hollywood Metal, then Cinematic Metal (those averse to genre labels you can continue reading again now).

Over this album's seventy minute run time, Rhapsody's Cinematic Metal approach continues to evolve and become more fully realised than ever before. Only the rapid firing drums remind you of the band's Metal roots. It's mostly orchestral in nature rather than Metal (a couple of good solos aside, the guitar is cast into the shadows for much of this record). What stands out are the complex choral arrangements; there is a mixture of male and female voices, epic choirs and Gregorian chants.

Some stellar Rock voices in the form of Ralph Scheepers of Primal Fear, David Readman of Pink Cream 69 and Dan Lucas of KARO all lend their backing while Rhapsody's lead singer Alessandro Conti does a good job with a variety of material and operates best when he's emulating Michael Kiske's soaring vocals.

The songs are sung in Italian, Latin and English underlining the record's diversity. Standouts offerings include 'Rosenkreuz (The Rose And The Cross)' which is more direct than a lot of the material with a good melody (thus perfect as first single) alongside 'One Ring To Rule Them All' where the feel of Tolkien's Shires is conjured up well. The last highlight might not have a title that runs off the tongue easily, 'Of Michael The Archangel And Lucifer's Fall Part II Codex Nemesis', but over its nineteen minutes it throws everything, including the kitchen sink (no, make that the Trevi fountain) into the mix.

Rhapsody fans will rejoice in this album's ambition, the rest of the world may find it endearingly bonkers.

Duncan Jamieson

MARCO DE FRANCESCO – 'THE WIZARD' *(Lion)* INSTRUMENTAL

Italy has been producing some cracking Melodic Rock for a while now and along with that has also come a prevalence of instrumental solo albums. This offering from Marco De Francesco makes its way into a crowded arena but has some high points with which to recommend it. For those who are unaware, De Francesco is the guitarist with Neurosphere and 'The Wizard' is his solo project.

Instrumental albums are frequently at risk of being overly self-indulgent, which I guess by their nature that's exactly what they are; either the opportunity for a musician to record all the music that doesn't make it through the band filter or going out of the genre they are known for. 'The Wizard' is soothing confection of melody with occasional Prog undertones which makes for an hour or so of very slick listening, possibly a little too slick at times; that is not to deride it, the production is exceptional and it sounds stunning.

'El Dorado' is probably the heaviest track; although primarily a track to show guitar, there are some nice keyboards and drums going on which fattens out the overall sound. 'Supernova' is possibly the most self-indulgent of the songs, and for me lost its way a little, along with the title track which is another rather self-indulgent fret-board noodle. The acoustic 'Secrets' is flawless and possibly my favourite track on the album.

'Nibiru' is one of the most interesting tracks with its constant change of pace, 'Golden Silence' also ebbs and flows like a tide in an estuary and 'Moonsong' is glorious and uplifting with guitar work that is just sublime. 'Memories' is smoochy, smooth and has a touch of Steve Hackett's 'Spectral Mornings' about it whilst the closer 'Two Days After Disaster' also has a "concept" vibe but this time more in turn with Rick Wakeman or Jeff Wayne

In truth, on first listen, this didn't really grab me by the throat and personally it felt was like an album of two parts. The first four tracks were skilled but not stand out, however the second set of songs were infinitely more interesting as though he'd found his stride.

I have to say that it grew on me the more I listened to it. There is real maturity in the writing and the production really is superb; it's an album where the more you listen, the more you hear. 'The Wizard' is the sort of album you sit around and listen to over and over with friends until you know every nuance and guitar lick like the back of your hand. If you're a lover of instrumental concept albums, then I rather think you will find this a treat.

Helen Bradley Owers

MARK SLAUGHTER – 'REFLECTIONS IN A REAR VIEW MIRROR' *(Independent)* HARD ROCK

It's been sixteen long years since 'Back To Reality' was released – Slaughter's (the band) last album. Since then, they have continued to tour sporadically during summer months, particularly with the 'Rock Never Stops' tour and the odd Rock cruise, whilst Mark Slaughter has immersed himself in television music work, producing and generally taken in other aspects of the entertainment business.

Wishing to get creative again, Mark Slaughter wrote 'Never Givin' Up' for the U.S. military that he holds in high esteem over a year ago and released it in digital format. It was essentially prime-time Slaughter with lots of harmony backing vocals and an obvious Nashville influence (he lives there). He performed everything himself bar the drums with old friend and two-time Las Vegas Rock Hall Of Fame inductee Mark Goodin stepping in.

'...Up' also features on this, his first (self-produced) solo release, alongside a few other songs that bear comparison to Slaughter; the mid-paced 'Away I Go' (despite its lack of trademark high notes and screams) and the contemporary mid-paced 'The Real Thing' which shows what a good guitarist Mark Slaughter actually is.

What I like about the album as a whole is its sheer inventiveness – it's full of ideas and offers a diverse range of musical styles with Mark Slaughter's solid instrumentation

throughout and fabulous drumming from the aforementioned Goodin. His expressive Latin beats and amazing cymbal work light up the up-tempo 'Miss Elainious' whilst the dirty riff gives it muscle.

The acoustic, mellow, Countrified 'Carry Me Back Home' and the instrumental 'In Circle Flight', with its piano and Native American pipes, offer a more reflective stance, as does the ballad 'Deep In Her Heart' with its weeping melody guitar.

But it is Michael Wagener's mixing and mastering that gives the album a truly immense sound. 'Baby Wants' has a subtle Led Zeppelin feel with great guitar, smooth melodies and lots of synth layers atop a superb mixed Jazz and Hard Rock beat.

'Don't Turn Away' is very Nelson-like and features a duet with Wagener's second engineer colleague Gena Johnson – a mix of super melodic Nelson harmonies and an Enuff Z Nuff chorus for good measure. Similarly 'Somewhere Isn't Here' has those bass-led EZN cool stylings with gorgeous harmonies and a great smile-inducing, super melodic chorus (again) superbly mixed by Wagener.

'Velcro Jesus' is another equally interesting song with its rhythmic Rocking vibe and catchy chorus full of backing vocals skirting in T-Ride and Saigon Kick (Jeff Bland was previously in SK) territory with a suitable overblown synth choral ending.

All in all what Mark Slaughter has produced here is a superb album to whet the appetite for a future Slaughter band album.

Carl Buxton

MASTER MASSIVE – 'THE PENDULUM' *(ViciSolum)* HEAVY METAL

Master Massive are described as a mythical Swedish Heavy Metal project that is led by Jan Strandh. Their concept album 'The Pendulum' provides seventy minutes of absurd Doom Metal, although the music is firmly anchored in the eighties.

The album is littered with notable guest artists such as Peo Pettersson (Axia, Leviticus), Katarina Lilja (Therion), Erik Forsberg, Öivin Tronstad (Jupiter Society), Tony Yoansson (Masquerade), Tony Niva (Niva, Lion´s Share) and Petter Karlsson (Therion).

It certainly is an ambitious musical idea and, at times, one that works quite well. 'Sovereign Power' taps into cult Doom Metal legends Witchfinder General with old-school, dirty riffs and vocals from the grave. Even the healthy gallop in 'The Media Palace' has plenty of head-banging fuel for any Rock fan to grab hold of.

However, on 'I Am The Prior' we get two vocalists playing off each other like arguing cast members from 'Blackadder'; I also couldn't help but think of Monty Python as well as Spinal Tap whilst listening. 'Four Dreams' has some Progressive Rock elements but a running time of eight minutes (not to mention the tiresome vocals) will test any listener.

The Pagan musical influence of the 'The Monastery' sounds quite forced and comical in my opinion, and it is not until halfway through that guitars pipe up and save the song from parody.

I really wanted to like this release, but sadly I found it hard to take it seriously.

Ray Paul

MASTERS OF DISGUISE – 'THE SAVAGE AND THE GRACE' *(Limb)* HEAVY METAL

If this name rings a few bells with older Metalheads, it's because it's a deliberate homage to the classic Savage Grace album 'Master Of Disguise', something which confuses the buggery out of Google. This is because of a rather convoluted band history that involves one original member of SG who vanished into thin air and what was essentially a NWOBHM tribute band he left behind that decided to carry on his vision because they quite liked the idea. Several line-up changes later and here they are with a second album that shamelessly wants to take you back thirty years to a time where men wore denim waistcoats and studded fingerless gloves with pride.

So do they succeed? Hell yes, as 'The Savage And The Grace' is a thundering piece of retro Metal that will absolutely delight fans of the genre. It's fast, furious and full of melody and power in equal measure. So many retro bands chuck out plodding slabs of uninspiring "Metal", but MOD want you to sit up, take notice and bang your fecking head! The star players of this band/release are Kalli Coldsmith, who plays some monumental guitar throughout, and soaring vocalist Alexx Stahl, who has a voice that totally suits the musical style and would have been a star in the mid-eighties (and may well be so today).

Even ballad 'The Scavenger's Daughter' punctuates the deep and meaningful (probably) acoustic bits with the odd power chord or two. They also do that thing where a song will gallop along, then you get half a second of silence and you just know a belter of a guitar solo is about to kick in. Yeah, it's Metal 101 for dummies but it still sounds great when done properly.

'The Savage And The Grace' is a throwback to the good old days, sure, but it's so well made, with such power and passion, that it works incredibly well in 2015. Personally, I prefer it to SG's own work, as these boys have poured in a lot of knowledge and experience getting it just right. This is "Metal For Muthas" and it may even be a case of buy or die!

Alan Holloway

MICHAEL DES BARRES – 'THE KEY TO THE UNIVERSE' *(FOD)* ROCK

Electing to go back to his musical career after enjoying a long stint of high profile acting roles, the ex-Detective/Power Station/Silverhead/Chequered Past vocalist Michael Des Barres released 'Carnaby Street' in 2012. It was an album that was influenced and performed in the style of music peddled by The Faces and Steve Marriott and something I really enjoyed. Des Barres received good reviews and played the material live, resulting in the raw release 'Hot And Sticky Live'. When he delivered his new album 'The Key To The Universe' this month, I was expecting more of the same; I was way off base.

The first thing that strikes you about '...Universe' is its sound. Booming, Led Zeppelin-like drums, grinding guitars, pulsating bass and the invigorated voice of Des Barres all mesh together to kick things off with a powerhouse rendition of Linda Perry's 'I Can't Get You Off My Mind'. The rhythm section of long term Des Barres friend Nigel Harrison (Blondie) and Robert Plant's former drummer Clive Deamer hold everything tight, allowing Jimi Hendrix Live Experience guitarist Dani Robinson chance to weave his magic. Crucially, he doesn't ever overplay, allowing Des Barres' voice to take centre stage, where it soars magnificently on 'Room Full Of Angels'.

Recorded live, to analogue tape, 'The Key To The Universe' has a warm, rumbling sound which allows Rockers like the glorious 'I Want Love To Punch Me In The Face' and the roaring 'Yesterday's Casanova' to really come to life. It's not all bombast either; 'It's Just A Dream' has a breezy guitar line and would be a great summer single, while the album closer, 'Supernatural Lovers', harnesses Johnson's Hendrix influences with a wah-wah drenched Psychedelic Funk vibe which takes you hurtling back to the golden days.

Everything about this album, from the way it was recorded and presented, to the overall sound, all hark back to those classic vinyl Rock albums from the 1970's. Apparently there is going to be a vinyl version coming, and if that's your preferred format, this will really give your stereo something to get its needle into.

Michael Des Barres believes this is the best album he's ever made. That's open to debate, due to the fact I'm a huge fan of Detective, but the grip this record has had on me, and it's insistence at being played over and over again, means it's right up there as a serious contender. Highly recommended!

James Gaden

MATTHAU MIKOJAN – 'HER FOREIGN LANGUAGE' *(Inverse)* ROCK

Matthau Mikojan hails from Finland and has just released 'Her Foreign Language'; a self-written and produced album which is quite a quirky affair. Essentially, there are two styles involved – straightforward Boogie-based Rock and Bluesy/inventive slower paced Rock.

The styles are interspersed in the album, starting with the Prog-ish 'Wrapped' with snatches of sitars and an unusual chorus – it is actually a strong song and builds on you after a few listens. The more accessible upbeat songs provide a powerful antidote to the more Progressive songs – so following the opener there is the straightforward 'Things You Can't Handle' with a nice tone to its guitar solo.

Some of the slower paced tracks are a bit too melancholy for my liking, such as 'You' and 'Presence' but fair play to him for trying to do something different to a standard ballad format. Again, on repeated listening they have a strange catchy feel to them. The jaunty 'Another Snake In Paradise' and 'Gold And Silver' lighten the overall mood of the album and I would say this style of song is Mikojan's sweet spot.

All songs are played and sung well and the earnestness in their performance has appeal – they just need a target audience. Although on balance this is a Rock album, there is a tone to Matthau Mikojan's voice that is reminiscent of David Bowie – that may explain my inability to definitively categorise this album.

Rob McKenzie

MELODIUS DEITE – 'EPISODE II: VOYAGE THROUGH THE WORLD OF FANTASY' *(Inazuma)* SYMPHONIC METAL

Thailand is not a country that you tend to associate with Rock music. Traditionally it was the U.K. and the U.S.A. that produced the world's leading Rock acts. Over the years however, nations such as Germany, Italy and various Scandinavian countries have spawned bands of an ever increasing quality; yet few, if any, have broken through from the South Eastern Peninsula. That may be about to change.

Bangkok-based Melodius Deite look set to cause quite a stir with the release of their second album. With a grand name like MD and song titles that include 'The Sun Of Aztec' and 'Alexander The Great', you just know that this isn't going to be some quirky Punk Pop skater combo or a misery-enshrouded Emo Screamo group. The band themselves describe their music as Symphonic Melodic Progressive Power Metal and that pretty much sums them up to perfection. More melodic than most Progressive Metal bands and far, far more Symphonic than your average run of the mill Power Metal act, Melodius Deite have taken the best elements from these genres and crafted an album that is something rather special.

From the opening sweeping orchestration of 'Entering The Gate' to the closing roller coaster ride of 'Sailing Around The World' taking in a myriad of styles in between (including hints of Jazz Funk in the mid-section), this sprawling double album with have fans of these collective genres frothing at the gills.

Other than the opening scene setting instrumental, there's no short, sharp catchy songs here. Instead we get epic, dramatic, Cinematic, mini Symphonies where the dynamics rise and fall as the pace and atmosphere changes throughout the musical journey.

The musicianship is exemplary as is absolutely essential for music like this. Anything other than a virtuoso performance could render such ambition fruitless yet the guitar and keyboard playing of founding member Biggie P. Phanrath is exceptional. If you can imagine the Classical runs of Yngwie Malmsteen but with more space and subtlety, then you'd not be too far wide of the mark. Vocalist Ake N. Keartpanich also has the class to match the ambition with the power of Russell Allen and a rather impressive range that bursts into life on '...Aztec'.

Like all albums that are this complex, it may take a few listens for the delights to start to sink in but do persevere as it is well worth the effort. Highlights include the distinctly Eastern flavoured 'Pyramids Of Egypt' which has a slight hint of Symphony X at their most Progressive, the gargantuan 'Civilization' clocking in at a startling sixteen minutes and the rampant 'Land Of Fantasy'. But in truth, each and every song shines on this hugely impressive album.

Mick Burgess

MICHAEL BORMANN – 'CLOSER' *(RMB)* MELODIC ROCK

Having released his last solo record ('Different') in 2010, as well as having been involved in numerous other bands (Redrum, Zeno, Silent Force, Bloodbound to name but a few), German Rock vocalist Michael Bormann has had a busy time during the last four years. 2015 sees him return to his solo ventures with his fifth album 'Closer'.

Since Bormann wrote all the songs himself and additionally played most of the instruments (other contributors include Marco Grasshoff (guitar), Eric Ragno (keyboards) and Bobby Stoecker (guitar)), the entire record is trademarked by his style. However, compared to his earlier efforts, various influences from other genres, such as Electro, Rap and Nu Metal – as I would describe it – make this record..."different".

'Closer' is generally rooted in Melodic Rock; 'I'm Not Your Entertainment', 'Let's Make

PALACE OF THE KING – 'WHITE BIRD/BURN THE SKY' *(Independent)* HARD ROCK

It's almost out of this world. And if you like the classic influence of Deep Purple, Uriah Heep and the like, I wager you will think that too. This is Antipodean awesomeness and it has been endorsed by none other than Airbourne's Joel O'Keefe, so who are we to argue?

For once, the press bio is correct when it states that they range from short Funkers to sweeping, Black Sabbath, seven minuters; although they have only been around for three years, time spent with Airbourne and The Tea Party (among others) touring The Boondocks has been very well spent.

Just check 'Take Your Medicine', which pulls off the trick of being "in your face" but laidback all at once, 'No Chance In Hell' which shakes a mean tambourine and mainlines that beautiful Blues stutter, segueing amazingly into a Country air with slide in the middle, or a creaky, wheezing Funk synth and massive beat, Mothers Finest at their... finest.

Reminiscent also of Wolfmother when they opened out and pulled in more influences on 'Cosmic Egg', 'White Bird (Bring Your Armies Against Me)' even throws in some really Soulful vocals, echoing round a huge construct with bass running around the walls and guitars squealing.

They even have a go at Pop goodness and heaving, chunky attack and pull it all off, whilst 'If It Ain't Broke' closes everything with a loping grace, like a puma with a Strat. Tim Henwood's voice is fine and flavoursome, Leigh Maden and Matthew Harrison's solos are fun and fiery; the band are just a treat from start to finish.

This Palace has impressive rugs and a roaring fire; make yourself comfortable.

Steve Swift

History', 'Never Say Die' 'Rich Men's World' and 'I Wanna Be A Rockstar' certainly fit that description. Unfortunately, the latter is just too cheesy and appears like a miscarried attempt to write a song for the well-known movie 'Rockstar'. The "white boy" Rap in 'Down To The Bottle' and 'Can't Get A Touch Too Much' appears equally weird and alien. I tend to like it when musicians test themselves and don't follow the same old patterns again and again, but here it turned out decidedly odd.

'For This One Time In Life' and the title-track are ballad-like and rather enjoyable, mainly because they really show off Bormann's great vocal abilities. The album also includes his interpretation of Demi Lovato's 'Warrior' which also appeared on the television show 'The Voice Of Germany'. The participation in said TV formats is questionable and I surely don't think that Bormann needed this as a platform after all he's achieved. But that's just my thoughts... 'Because We Are The World' is also extraordinarily cheesy; a mixture of Rock and World music with a "message", accompanied by the ultimate proof why German child choirs are a very bad idea when English lyrics are involved. The far-from-authentic, dripping sentimentality of this entire track almost made my toenails curl.

I'm feel bad for giving 'Closer' a rather poor review since I always liked Bormann and I truly appreciate his former records and his fantastic voice. But although most of the songs are generally nicely written, with a nice dose of AOR accessibility and catchy choruses, the cheesiness and questionable elements of other genres as well as a rather flat sound make the record appear like an attempt to be more modern, inventive and sophisticated.

In this case I'd say sticking to what is good makes more sense and I truly hope to be presented with another great AOR record by Michael Bormann at some point in the future.

Julia Braun

MOJOROSE – 'MOJOROSE' *(Mojorock)* HARD ROCK

Despite the march of time, some bump and grinding Blues Rock can still articulate a young man's libido better than most other forms of music; this four-piece band from Nashville do exactly that on their thumping debut.

It takes the Rocking riff approach to Blues and Hard Rock, but adds enough of a Modern Rock edge and attitude to breathe some fresh life into a well-worn formula. Their modern influences are harder to pin down but there are slight shades of Stone Temple Pilots in the grooves.

What did surprise me about MoJoRose was their origin, as they have an almost British Modern Rock feel, especially lead singer Jason West – in truth they actually hail from Nashville, Tennessee. 'That Ain't Me' first piques the interest as it strikes out with a heads down boogie which is part Bonafide and part The Black Crowes. 'White Lady' has a mock Beatles intro before it amps up and delivers a Rock 'n' Roll solo.

'Mornin' Glory' rattles and hums dirtily with some Led Zeppelin lemon squeezing going on and a Psychedelic solo. 'Black 'N' Blue' starts with some woozy, Bluesy acoustic guitar and has a tune that reminds you of 1990's Brit Rock in the form of Ocean Colour Scene or even Paul Weller.

'Whisky Bottle' has a Jimi Hendrix 'Red House' vibe while 'I Was Wrong' is overwrought Blues that has an Alternative Rock slant. Coming across a little like U.K. Rockers The Brew, 'Dog' hits you with a wall of sound and the album closer 'My Freedom Song' again favours a Psychedelic approach with its title sung over and over again – almost mantra-like.

It's an album that, while Bluesy, eschews most of the Trad Blues clichés and embraces Rock. It's sturdy but for all the elbow grease, some of the songs (although swathed in guitar and sung well enough by West) need more maturing before MojoRose fully blossoms.

Duncan Jamieson

MONSTER SOUND – 'WHO'S LAUGHING NOW?' *(Independent)* HARD ROCK

Here's a curious proposition – album number three by a Hard Rocking Swiss quartet with silly names. Founded in 2006 by drummer, lead vocalist and song-writer Mr. Killjoy, Monster Sound look to be gearing up for a serious assault on the world of Heavy Rock. Recorded and mixed in the U.K. and mastered in the United States, 'Who's Laughing Now?' is the sound of a band looking to spread its wings.

On the face of it, they have a hard job ahead of them. No one in their right mind is going to be drawn to this album by the artwork, which features pictures of the boys, apparently fresh from some Quentin Tarantino-inspired heist, hanging around long enough to have their photos done as the fire they've just started rages behind them. I've actually made it sound better than it looks – the best you can say of the album artwork is that it doesn't have much going for it.

Then there are the lyrical themes that, at times, are hackneyed and clichéd beyond belief. "Swallow my love whole, fire in the hole," sings Mr. Killjoy in 'Whiskey Night Love'. "I've got a dirty mind and I know it," he tells us in 'Dirty Minded' before continuing with "I want a dirty time and I will have it"; that gives you the general idea. And then there are those names; alongside the ubiquitous Killjoy, guitar treats are provided by The Stone, keyboards come courtesy of Dark Snake and bass is played by the relatively normally named Zhayne Watt.

These things would be causes for concern, and might well help to consign Monster Sound to the also-rans pile, were it not for the fact that the music is actually rather good. Ten catchy, Sleaze-fuelled tracks that fair motor along with admirable energy and serious sing-a-long-ability (yes, it seems I now have a dirty mind and know it too). Whatever fun I might poke at his name, Stone has brought a bucketful of cool riffs to the party – check out the title track, 'Wicked' and 'Still Alive' for example – and bangs out some seriously striking solos. Elsewhere 'Nowhere To Hide' and closer 'Paranoid City' demonstrate the band's ability to build more powerful, weighty compositions, with Snake's keyboards used to good effect and Watt's bass solid at the core.

There is swagger, confidence and an almost unbearable arrogance in abundance here – but, to be fair, musically speaking track after track delivers. So, 'Who's Laughing Now?' Not me, honest.

Michael Anthony

MOXY – '1974 TO 2014 : 40 YEARS AND STILL RIDING HIGH' *(Escape)* HARD ROCK

Canadian Hard Rockers Moxy first hit the music headlines back in 1974 when their first single 'Can't You See I'm A Star' started to get regular airplay on Canadian radio station CHUM AM.

What followed was a rollercoaster ride that saw the band signing with Polydor and having their albums produced by the legendary Jack Douglas (Aerosmith/Blue Öyster Cult/Starz). With successful tours and albums under their belts, Moxy looked ready to take on the world when tragedy struck; their lead singer Buzz Shearman was sadly killed in a motorcycle accident in 1983 and the band, although they carried on in various forms, never really got over this.

Nevertheless, founder band member and lead guitarist Earl Johnson decided that, even though he'd be writing and playing with different incarnations of Moxy for many years, that it was now time to put the band back together and properly celebrate Moxy's 40th Anniversary. He then set about assembling an international cast of musicians to help him and he's joined on this album by Nick Walsh (Slik Toxik, Famous Underground) on lead vocals, Alexis Von Kraven (ex-Heavens Fire) on drums, Rob Robbins (Rhett Forrester) on guitar and Oscar Anesetti (Rabid Hole) on bass.

And what you get on this release are some splendid re-recorded versions of classic Moxy songs. I'm not usually a big a fan of re-recorded stuff but Moxy (this version) have done such a marvellous job (in Walsh they have a singer who can really do these songs justice) that I soon found my reservations falling away.

Songs from the band's illustrious past like 'Midnight Flight', 'Moon Rider', 'Out Of The Darkness', 'Nothing Comes Easy', 'Through The Storm', 'Sail On, Sail Away' and new track 'Trouble', which fits in perfectly with the older material, can all be found on this album (plus many more) and it was truly a blast to revisit Moxy's back catalogue.

There's also the added bonus of some special packaging for this release plus a live DVD recorded in Toronto back in 2013 that comes free with the first two thousand copies of the album. It's a basic, club shot video but the sound is good and the band are clearly having a ball; it's a very nice thing to have.

Personally, for me, this is a "must have" album, especially for fans of classic Canadian Hard Rock. Also it's a great introduction (if you haven't heard them before) to one of Rock's cult bands. Now where's the re-issues of Moxy I-II etc?

Ian Johnson

MR. EGO – 'SEVEN' *(Independent)* PROGRESSIVE

Mr. Ego are a Brazilian Progressive Metal band from Monte Azul Paulista, Sao Paulo. They were brought to my attention by Alessandro Del Vecchio, who told me that their singer "just has to be heard because he so good"...and you know what, he wasn't wrong.

Not only are ME a band who play some superb, dark, complex and passionate Prog Metal, they also have, in André Anheiser Ferrari (ex Eyes Of Shiva), a singer that could give Russell (God) Allen a run for his money. Therefore, as you might expect, the band's music and the album's overall feel does have a lot of Symphony X references running through it. But the music is delivered with such passion and vitality that you soon forgive them for these few comparisons, instead finding yourself relaxing and just enjoying what ME have created on 'Seven'.

There is that distinct SyX feel to ME's music and the opening tracks 'Fall On Our Knees' and 'Broken Walls' could easily have come off 'The Divine Wings Of Tragedy' or 'Twilight In Olympus' albums, which is a big compliment. They then continue to pour the same intensity and fire into such wonderful songs as '1917', which unsurprisingly is all about WWI, the very melodic 'Injustice', which sees Ferrari showing he can sing in a more subtle "less Metal" way when needed, and the bruising 'Black Gold', where the guitars of Yuri are all caustic riffs one minute, then understated guitar solos the next.

Finally there's the three part 'Silence Of The Lambs' which is spread over twelve minutes and can only be described as the album's tour-de-force. Building slowly from a piano/vocal led intro piece into a full-on, "in your face" guitar/keyboard/bass/drum onslaught that, when combined with the vocals of Ferrari, becomes a truly devastating example of Progressive Metal.

On the strength of this release, I can see a big, bright future for Mr. Ego. They have the musicianship and song-writing skills needed to go far in this overcrowded genre and, in Ferrari, they have singer who will make a lot of people sit up and take notice.

Ian Johnson

NASHVILLE PUSSY – 'TEN YEARS OF PUSSY' *(Steamhammer/SPV)* HARD ROCK

A bar room bruiser of a Rock 'n' Roll band from Atlanta, Nashville Pussy are probably the closest thing that Uncle Sam has to our very own Motörhead. Taking their name

from Ted Nugent's immortalised introduction to 'Wang Dang Sweet Poontang' on 1978's 'Double Live Gonzo' album, the band have been kicking up a shit storm in one form or another since the late 1990s – their debut 'Let Them Eat Pussy' first emerged in 1998 as I recall. Largely ignored by the mainstream media, the four-piece have nevertheless achieved something of a cult status on the underground scene, a growing legion of fans around the globe happy to wave the banner whenever they roll into town.

To celebrate their decade long partnership with Steamhammer/SPV, the band has just released the bumper compilation album 'Ten Years Of Pussy'. A two disc set with the first disc containing sixteen of the best tracks from the last decade and the second a blistering six tracker recorded at Nottingham's Rock City back in 2009. If you're new to the phenomenon that is NP, this is a great way to get up close and personal.

Singing songs about sex, drugs, Rock 'n' Roll, drinking and fighting, their overdriven, unapologetic sound could be described as a cross between Motörhead, AC/DC and Lynyrd Skynyrd – lean, mean and full of attitude. Lacking pretension, subtlety and (to a large degree) anything like finesse, they nevertheless whip up a veritable storm (especially live) and I defy anyone not to be transfixed by the force of nature that NP in full flow – check out their rambling run through of 'Nutbush City Limits' on the second disc and you'll get a real taste of the Pussy!

Personally speaking, I'd start with disc two as that really showcases NP at their most primal – sweat soaked, dirty and meaner than an alley cat in heat! 'Go Motherfucker Go', 'You're Goin' Down' and 'Struttin' Cock' all have the crowd eating out of the palm of their hand in a way that many more prominent bands would sell their girlfriends for! Crank it up and let it go… this is worth the admission price alone in my book.

As for the main event...well...where to start? As I said earlier, subtlety and finesse aren't words you'd ever associate with NP, but if you're looking for some good time, Rootsy Rock 'n' Roll delivered with barbed passion and angst, you won't find anything better. Kicking off with the rowdy 'Come On, Come On' from 2005's 'Get Some!' opus, Nashville Pussy hit you with the force of a runaway freight train. 'Going Down Swinging' is all Bon Scott attitude, whilst the hilarious 'Before The Drugs Wear Off' is akin to Johnny Cash fronting Steel Panther. Then there's the groove laden 'Til' The Meat Falls Off The Bone', the Blues-tinged shuffle of 'Lazy Jesus' (which features Lemmy Kilmister), the thumping 'The South's Too Fat To Rise Again'… oh I really could go on, but by now you must have got the picture!

Edgy, anthemic and raucous … bow to the all-conquering power of Pussy!

Dave Cockett

NEAL SCHON – 'VORTEX' *(Mascot/Music Theories)* INSTRUMENTAL

After last year's triple vocal album 'So U' with Marco Mendoza and Deen Castronovo, prolific Journey guitarist Neal Schon has returned to the instrumental format with this double album which contains just under a hundred minutes of music. Working with his usual alumni of keyboardist Igor Len (ex-Yes) and former Journey drum legend Steve Smith, 'Vortex' delivers pretty much what fans of albums like 'The Calling' and 'I On U' have come to expect; a mix of Rock, Jazz, Blues and Fusion styles, bound together by Schon's accessible compositions along with his inimitable tone and passion.

The quality is uniformly high, starting with the heavily layered 'Miles Beyond', which takes a while to really get going but builds to a dramatic crescendo. Schon's beautiful playing shines brightly during the Dark Fusion of 'Awakening', the slow and Bluesy 'In A Cloud' and the upbeat Progressive themes of 'Irish Cream', with 'Airliner NS910' (signifying his ninth and tenth albums respectively) rounding out the first disc in a blaze of wild solos without losing the strong song structure. The Latin shuffle of 'Cuban Fly Zone' and flamenco aspects of 'El Matador' add even more variation, as does Len's haunting piano piece 'Eternal Love'.

If anything the second disc is even better and features some of the longest tracks. 'Tortured Souls', for instance, is very song-based and clocks in at over ten minutes of Beatles-esque melodies and arrangements whilst 'NS Vortex' and 'Talk To Me' both last over eight minutes; the former an upbeat Rocker with furious guitar, drums and keys and the latter building from a mellow intro to a complex, Progressive tour-de-force. Some of the shortest pieces are here too, like the simple atmospherics of 'Unspoken Faith' and the gorgeous acoustic guitar interludes 'Mom' and 'White Light'. Other highlights include the memorable dramatics of 'Twilight – Spellbound' and Schon's delicate subtlety on 'Triumph Of Love'. But for my money the self-explanatory 'Schon And Hammer Now' trumps all with its Rocky riffs, lovely mellow bit in the middle and a lively guitar/synth trade-off between Schon and his legendary, former conspirator Jan Hammer.

I'm aware that instrumental music is an acquired taste and the long running time of this double disc effort may make it hard for all but the most devoted of fans to listen to in one sitting. However, the song construction and the virtuosity of all involved makes 'Vortex' one of the best examples of the genre and one of the strongest releases of Schon's solo career.

Phil Ashcroft

NEXT TO NONE – 'A LIGHT IN THE DARK' *(InsideOut)* PROGRESSIVE

One has to admire the talent and proficiency of a bunch of school kids (because that's what they are) who produce music of this quality. Make no mistake, these guys are very good musicians (make that exceptional) and if the likes of Dream Theater are to your liking, then it's more than likely you will probably want to possess this album.

However, there is one significant aspect that may influence your decision and that's the presence of Doom/Death style vocals, which of course comes down to a matter of personal taste. At times, on what I would term the clean vocals, the relative youth of Thomas Cuce (vocals & keys) does become obvious, but it's the growling, screaming and guttural style, which is the predominant variety employed that will divide opinion.

Musically I can't fault what's on offer. For young lads they have a keen ear for melodies, themes, riffs, hooks and song structures; they solo without being too flashy. The DT comparisons are unavoidable and probably not unexpected particularly when the drummer is a certain Max Portnoy, son of the ubiquitous Mike, with the latter being the album's producer. Max Portnoy's style is, not surprisingly, very similar to his father's. The rest of the band comprises of Ryland Holland (guitars) and Kris Rank (bass), both of whom are equally adept as their band mates; Holland's solos are both incisive and interesting.

Of the nine tracks, opener 'The Edge Of Insanity' is close to ten minutes long and has an atmospheric intro before a flurry of drums picks up the speed: evil sounding Hammond Organ reminds one of Derek Sherinian. The vocal arrangement has a straight voice answered by a growl with a chorus that is catchy. The mid-song melange of sound-bites, which one presumes indicates the insanity, is a touch ostentatious. 'You Are Not Me' has a terrific riff and this time, the growl takes the lead with the clean voice being reserved for the chorus, which again is top quality. It is a trait the band displays throughout.

'Runaway' has a dominant bass at its outset before a very heavy riff appears. 'A Lonely Walk' is a highlight with a beautiful piano refrain; it's a ballad in vein of DT's 'Hollow Years'. 'Control' returns us to the heavy spectrum, although for me the arrival of the Doom element does detract. 'Lost' apes 'Hall Of The Mountain King' during the first half with clean vocals throughout. 'Social Anxiety' has a great riff while 'Legacy' is the other ballad and therefore another highlight. The vocal delivery and phrasing is pure James La Brie.

Closer, 'Blood On My Hands', is the big finish being pacey and heavy.

Gary Marshall

POWERWOLF – 'BLESSED AND POSSESSED' *(Napalm)* POWER METAL

Many had wondered after the release of 'Preachers Of The Night' if Powerwolf could top an album which has gone on to become recognised as their finest so far. With 'Blessed And Possessed' we have the answer and put simply, everything you could want from a Powerwolf album is here; Attila Dorn's captivating Operatic vocals, a collection of ridiculously prevailing hooks and, of course, the ludicrously fast driving force of Roel Van Helden's drums.

'Army Of The Night' is explosive, pure, authentic Power Metal, ready and willing to knock you from your feet. Just when you've think you've recovered, you have to prepare yourself for synthesizers to create a full, bold sound that will have you floundering once more. It's hard to imagine things getting even better from there but 'We Are The Wild' is simply overflowing with catchy verses and choruses so infectious that you'll think you come down with "Powerwolf fever". Throughout the album the material has a real energetic live feel, but here that effect is ramped up to the max. 'Higher Than Heaven' carries the high spirits onwards and upwards, whereas 'Sacramental Sister' is joyfully dark and dramatic - the truly glorious guitar solo will leave you intensely satisfied. The album closes with 'Let There Be Light', Dorn's vocals again hypnotic during a track that will entrance you from start to finish. The themes, production and textures on 'B&P' all follow on from the high standard 'Preachers…' set out, yet Powerwolf have found something extraordinary, the ability to take something that was already superb and inject it with a barrow-load of "fuck yeah!"

'Blessed And Possessed' is an album which engages from the off and leaves you thoroughly captivated throughout. When the record does come to an end, you're left almost drained by the adrenalin rush of what has come before, but also with a true sense of musical nourishment. 'Blessed And Possessed'? Powerwolf fans everywhere are sure to think so!

Lara Kisel

NG26 – 'UNTIL MY HEART STOPS' *(Holier than Thou)* MODERN/ALTERNATIVE

NG26 are a Modern Alternative Metal band who have just unveiled their latest album 'Until My Heart Stops' They are local to Derbyshire which is home to Bloodstock, one of the best (in my opinion) Metal festivals going. There is also a great hub of up and coming Metal bands from that area, which is not surprising given the county has been responsible for some incredible Metal bands. That said, I am not sure where NG26 fits in within that hub.

Having listened to this album, I am curious to know what their inspiration for it was. There are a lot of harsh tones that are uncomplimentary to the melody; for example on 'Save It for Me', the harmonies are sharp and disjointed. It's quite an emotional song but somehow it comes across, for a lack of a better word, shrill.

The album is another example of a lack of quality in production and possibly even song-writing. Recently in Metal, there seems to be this obsession with over powering guitars to the point of destruction. All this does is lose the clarity; with over exposure you lose the guitar tone and emotion that could potentially be heard and it also shields the listener from what else is going on (with the other instruments for example) during the specific track or album as a whole.

One regular casualty of this (for me) is the drums which are regularly concealed by this approach. This results in the heavy groove and drive being lost and that is what is missing throughout the album. The verses lack hooks that attract you to the chorus and middle, where most of the fun actually happens, but the interest has died before it has got to that point regardless of whether it is actually there; 'Ceasefire' is a perfect example of this.

There is some evidence of melody here, but things don't seem to fit nicely together. 'Out Of My Life' is a track where, at times, there is so much going on I don't know what to listen to; it all gets a bit too messy.

A lot could be said about this album, some positive and some negative. There is clearly an eagerness to get material out there and that might be the problem. Perhaps not enough attention has been paid to getting the actual direction of said material right and therefore properly shaping the sound of this release.

Lara Kisel

NIGHTMARE WORLD – 'IN THE FULLNESS OF TIME' *(Pure Legend)* PROGRESSIVE

Hailing from the U.K., Nightmare World are celebrating the release of 'In The Fullness Of Time', their first full-length album and official debut, following on from their 'No Regrets' EP

which surfaced in 2009.

So what do we hear? NW, a six-piece Progressive Metal group, have a keen sense of melody and rhythm that is surrounded in a circle of power and Metal-tipped Symphonies! There are nine tracks on this release and although the album clocks in at just over thirty-five minutes, each piece is a complete musical journey or, to use an alternative phrase, a Symphonic Hard Rock feast.

One can hear the craftsmanship, the attention to detail and the love and care that each member gave to this record! With such a combination of elements, pulled from a wide spectrum of musical styles, these movements demand an emotion-filled vocal delivery – and NW has just that.

Threshold's Pete Morten takes on the lead vocal chores joining Sam Shuttlewood (guitars), Nick Clarke (keyboards), Joey Cleary (guitars), Billy Jeffs (drums) and David Moorcroft (bass) in creating a very commanding and hard hitting, yet melodic, canopy of music.

Listening to this album, expect both the music and vocals to entice and totally immerse you. Each musical passage will keep you intrigued, as this group unfolds each deep story through song. NW are not just another Symphonic Metal music project, these six musicians are the "real deal" – exploring a variety of musical styles but seamlessly melting them in to a Progressive stance. Also, they are all working musicians, performing these classic excursions live on stage with equal power and conviction!

'In The Fullness Of Time" is well worth exploring and NW well worth watching out for! Nightmare World – Symphonic in nature, Cinematic in scope.

Bruce E.J. Atkinson

O'REGAN – 'TUNNEL VISION' *(ZRecords)* MELODIC ROCK

O'Regan are back! It's unlikely you could have cooled off after last year's 'Temptation', yet the time has come for another fine Melodic Rock release to make it onto your CD shelf. Vince O'Regan has once again returned, this time with 'Tunnel Vision', backed up by the half of the Legion line-up (bassist Gavin Cooper and drummer Andy Pierce) as well as Eric Ragno (Takara, Michael Bormann, Wicked Sensation and dozens more) on keyboards. But as is often the case with the star-studded formula of this and other similar projects, it's the names of the singers that usually electrifies the audience. So what does '...Vision' contain musically and who is the amazing ensemble behind it?

All the guest singers who performed on this release should be quite well known within Melodic Rock circles; however, the biggest name on the bill this time around is once again Paul Sabu, who also appeared in a couple of tracks on the previous O'Regan outing. Here his contributions are 'Let's Give A Cheer' and 'We Will Survive' – melodic, feisty Rockers with handfuls of 1980's tints, contagious choruses and bombastic keyboards. Stevie K (of Escape fame) also appears – his contributions include the big chorus, dynamic opener 'Fallen Angel', the classic AOR sounding 'If You Could See Me Now' and (ironically) the finale 'Escape'.

An obligatory ballad arrives with 'Never Look Back' – the semi-acoustic piece featuring Danny Veras on vocals with a bit of Tyketto or perhaps even Warrant-esque flavour to it (the latter's classic 'Heaven' being the very first association). 'Price Of Loving You' and 'Nothing I Can Do About It' are melodic mid-tempo numbers in the vein of Bad English – a comparison furthered by the fact that they both feature Simon Abbotts (Pulse) whose vocal expression is somewhat similar to that of John Waite. The last of the singers queuing in the recording studio is Phil Vincent of Legion who features on 'Caught In The Act' and 'Calm Before The Storm' which are both tastefully catchy and melodic.

The line between predictability and the repetitiveness of the formula is something all projects like this one dread to cross, but that is not the case with O'Regan's new album. Its patchwork structure shows different tints and dimensions to the Melodic Hard Rock genre, with each contributor adding a bit of different shade and colour to the entire picture. Add to this the fact that it is all embroidered with a solid instrumental background (a throwback to the 1980s all along the way) and you end up with another recommended album from O'Regan.

Alexandra Mrozowska

OSUKARU – 'TRANSITION' *(City Of Lights)* MELODIC ROCK

Swedish Melodic Rockers Osukaru, led by guitarist and founder Oz Osukaru, return with their fifth official release 'Transition'; however it's not actually a completely new release per se but a "mini-album" of five new tracks and five re-recordings of earlier tracks.

I won't admit to being an expert on the band as I've never heard a complete and full album, but what I do like is the dual male/female lead vocals of Fredrik Werner and Cecilia Camuii (the latter is also a latex model whose image is on the album cover). While Camuii is not in the same league as the likes of Lzzy Hale or Robin Beck when it comes to vocal range, I enjoy the dynamic it gives the band as it's rarely used within the parameters of true Melodic Rock. There are also occasional stabs of saxophone (courtesy of Jens Björk) throughout the album; it's not an instrument I'm particularly keen on but when it's used sparingly, as here, it does add a certain class to proceedings.

Of the new tracks, the opening 'Arrows' is a glorious Melodic Rocker with a hard edge, dual lead vocals and a big chorus, Werner's 'Strangled Emotions' has a West Coast feel, Camuii's 'Edge Of A Broken Heart' (also featuring guitarist Janne Stark of Grand Design) drifts towards a Pop Rock style and 'Blinded Eyes' blends ballad-ish verses with a Metallic, riff-driven chorus and slightly Progressive passages. 'Play' is a pacey instrumental that gives Osukaru ample opportunity to shine, though Björk also has his share in the spotlight.

As for the re-recordings, you get the great 'Tell Me You'll Stay', 'Out Of Touch', 'Mafia Rules' (which includes guitarist Erik Heikne from Miss Behaviour and vocalist Jules Millis of White Widdow/Tigertailz), 'Promised Land' and the slightly Funky 'City Lights'. As I'm not aware of the older material I'm unable to determine if the re-recorded versions are an improvement on the originals. However if, like me, you're unfamiliar with Osukaru then as far as I'm concerned this is as good a place as any to start.

Ant Heeks

OVERLOUD – 'ALTERED EGO' *(Rock*CD)* HARD ROCK

Hailing from Spain, rambunctious high energy Rockers Overloud take their cue from Swedish Sleaze acts but veer more towards the Glam styling of Mötley Crüe overall. 'Altered Ego' is a rebellious, dangerous, loud and a nasty "flip of the bird" to authority; teenagers will love this album, parents will hate it! It's an instantly likeable record and no matter how hard you try not to, you will find yourself slowly edging the volume control further and further up.

Exhibiting lots of energy with strong vocal melodies that overlap infectious guitar riffage, it's hard not to thoroughly enjoy '...Ego' and its fist pumping choruses that hark back to the early Skid Row album. One listen to this makes you really keen to see these guys live as many of these tracks have "dance floor filler" written all over them and throughout the album, you can picture the crowd hair flipping and dancing like nutters.

Overloud do have a modern-tinge, which is a nod to the aforementioned modern Scandinavian Sleaze outfits, but there is also that overwhelming late eighties L.A. Sunset Strip vibe which is only accentuated further by some questionable and sexual lyrics. They obviously have lots of influences from that era as they even dabble with a Country guitar vibe occasionally akin to what Bon Jovi did with their "cowboy" touches. The standard of guitar playing on this album is very impressive; many of my favourite moments are from the melodic and intricate guitar licks and riffs. A lot of Modern Sleaze bands go for blunt force riffs but Overloud obviously prefer to have a more defined and diverse guitar sound similar to their obvious eighties influences.

At fourteen tracks, a couple of stinkers do rear their ugly heads but these rare blips are totally overshadowed by the quality of the rest of the album. These guys aren't that well known but given the strength of 'Altered Ego', they should kick up a stink in Modern Sleaze and Glam circles. A smooth and polished production also makes them far more commercial than a lot of the rawer Sleaze bands at the moment, so fans of a more melodic tone will also appreciate these guys.

Summing up, this is a very strong and likeable release that is full of high energy, fist-pumping Rockers and memorable choruses to "rebel yell" along to. Not only should this album appeal to the vast majority of Modern Sleaze fans, but it should also get old-school Mötley Crüe and early Skid Row fans pretty moist; just remember to play it at full volume for maximum enjoyment!

Paul Woodward

PENDRAGON – 'MEN WHO CLIMB MOUNTAINS' *(Toff)* PROGRESSIVE

A few years ago Nick Barrett decided to be a little less "nicey, nicey" and started to write material of a darker nature; personally, I think it was a good decision. Whilst it would be fair to say that Pendragon will not reach the heights of Pink Floyd with that shift in direction, they both moved away from, and yet got closer to, PF at the same time.

Although the title would suggest the album is about Chris Bonnington and his like, it really isn't. It is about all of us, the adversities we face, and the effects they have on us. Opening track 'Belle Ame' sets the tone by asking numerous questions about your life and this leads straight into 'Beautiful Soul' which features some excellent Rick Wakeman style keyboard from Clive Nolan. 'Come Home Jack' makes Latin sound cool for the first time ever and Barrett has the honours for the cool solo here.

'In Bardo' may be lyrically sparse but it is musically epic, with a really good synth and guitar solo from Barrett, but is spoilt for me a little by the free form piano and keyboard at the end. 'Faces Of Light' is a track that Camel fans will love, while 'Faces Of Darkness' is probably the most angst ridden and aggressive offering to be found here.

By this point I had worked out that the songs on here actually work in pairs, the second linked to the first, the fourth to the third etc. However, this is not the case with 'For When The Zombies Come' which is a slow paced, stand alone song that sounds closest to PF whilst also being a little bit Jazzy; how weird is that? And obviously "Zombies" is a metaphor, as we all know they don't really exist. There is reverse oration at the end of this as well, so if you wanna play….

'Explorers Of The Infinite' is a bit of a slow burner with a touch of Marc Knopfler in it and is probably the album's most "on one level" track, while album closer 'Netherworld' harkens back to the Pendragon of old but it is a rather surprisingly muted end to the album, as opposed to the big finish I was expecting.

So this is a good album and one which it didn't take me long to get into. It is thought provoking and will please all Pendragon lovers, despite the quiet ending, and as we all know, you are only as good as your last offering and on that score I think "the dragon" will be with us for a few years to come...even if they have mountains to climb.

Andy Brailsford

ROMEO'S DAUGHTER – 'SPIN' *(RD)* MELODIC ROCK

It's no secret that I am a long standing fan of British AORsters Romeo's Daughter. When they returned from a lengthy break with 'Rapture' a few years back (nearly twenty years after their second album) I was a rather happy bunny, especially as the music it contained was delectable. It's a couple of years further on and recently the band have revealed the follow up, and the music is pretty much what a fan of the previous album would expect – melodic, laid back at times and beautifully delivered.

The main focus will always be on vocalist Leigh Matty, she has always displayed a fine set of pipes in the studio and on stage in equal measure. 'Spin' features several tracks that could be slotted into any period of the band's history, yet they still sound fresh for today's audiences. Rather than play traditional AOR like Night Ranger or Danger Danger, RD seem to have a sound that is simple yet all their own. There is, and never has, been an urgency to get anywhere quick (except on the 1990's single 'Attracted To The Animal', maybe), but the songs are so well crafted that this facet simply isn't missed. 'Spin' doesn't get above a canter (the incredibly catchy riffs of 'Radio' would, in a just world, be a massive hit) and is unlikely to appeal to those who like their music fast and furious.

As ever, Romeo's Daughter separate themselves from the herd simply through delivering quality songs that won't scare away "non Rock" fans. 'Spin' is a perfect follow up to 'Rapture' with a similar pace and melody to it with the same crystal clear production. It's like the musical equivalent of a warm cuddle on a cold night, with honey sweet vocals and hooks catchy as the common cold. Yeah, I must be getting soft in my old age because I absolutely love this.

Alan Holloway

SAVATAGE – 'RETURN TO WACKEN (CELEBRATING THE RETURN ON STAGE OF ONE OF THE WORLD'S GREATEST PROGRESSIVE METAL BANDS)' *(earMUSIC)* PROGRESSIVE METAL

Over a decade has passed since the last live appearance of legendary Progressive Metallers Savatage at the (equally) legendary Wacken Festival in 1998, and then again in 2002. When co-founder Jon Oliva announced the band's final breakup in 2007, the majority of the fans they had garnered – with their exceptional performances and musically unique style, depth and ingenuity – were all obviously devastated. Savatage have always been famous for their musical variety and their powerful, partly Progressive, Metal sound that was mixed with orchestral elements (especially on 'Streets' and 'Dead Winter Dead') while never neglecting memorability or melodiousness.

Now in 2015, the band is back – at least in a certain way – with the release of an album that not only signifies a beautiful remembrance to both of the aforementioned Wacken shows, but also prepares everyone for a de facto return to Wacken this year as Savatage, and also Trans Siberian Orchestra. For those who may be unaware, the latter is an outstanding project that developed from a series of events that included the "almost breakup" of Savatage in 1986 (due to financial problems) and the tragic death of Criss Oliva in 1993, alongside the additional orchestral visions of Jon Oliva and Paul O'Neill and the interest and far-sightedness of Atlantic Records, who encouraged them both to follow their visions and initiate the TSO formation.

Savatage's 'Return To Wacken' includes a selection of eleven studio songs based on the set-lists of the above two Wacken shows. There are those who will say that this is just a making money-making exercise but I'd like to ask those detractors to re-consider. Of course, this is a compilation and the songs are studio versions but the album would be better viewed as a memory that the band wants to share with their fans. Musically it features a high-quality CD with brilliant sound on which amazing masterpieces, such as 'Hall Of The Mountain King', 'Gutter Ballet', 'Believe', 'The Wake Of Magellan' and beautiful 'When The Crowds Are Gone', bring back emotions and awe and just make you want to listen to all the Savatage records in your collection again. In addition there is the booklet which includes a large number of rare and authentic photographs, personal memories of Jon Oliva and several comments of the press about the two Wacken shows.

In short, this is a fine representational piece of history (given the lack of availability of any actual live material from said shows) and a quality way for Savatage to be remembered and brought back to our awareness. For those who will attend Wacken in 2015, it's also a perfect way to get in the mood for another, very likely, legendary appearance.

Julia Braun

PSYENCE – 'ERASED BY REASON' *(iMusician)* INSTRUMENTAL

Describing themselves and their debut release as "Instrumental Progressive Rock from Offenburg, Germany" doesn't fall too far off the mark at all for Psyence. Although after a few spins, it appears maybe it might be more appropriate for them to pitch/define themselves more towards the Alt/Post Rock end of the spectrum. Not that it matters greatly as their particular challenge, of course, lies in delivering an album of instrumental pieces which is varied and maintains the interest.

The quartet, made up of Julius Münnig and Daniel Schell on guitars, Georg Meffle on bass and Julian Braun on drums, are very much a self-sufficient outfit with the record also produced by Münnig and the band, recorded and mixed by Münnig but mastered by Stefan Höger.

The music itself ranges from the brief 'IIIIII', a gathering of atmospheric ambience ending with the ticking of a clock which leads into 'Dex' – by contrast a twelve minute piece which shows the other side of the coin and allows the band to show what they can do in an extended format. Dripping water is overtaken by some heavy chunks of guitar which give an indication of their heavier Prog Metal direction. As a closing track it just about gathers together all the elements which have emerged during the course of the album.

There's some clever sequencing it has to be said in saving what many might believe is the choice material until the middle of the album. Sensing there's the possibility of a lull after the opening couple of tracks, we get a pair of outstanding workouts in 'Eloszor' (clocking in at a healthy ten minutes) which, together with 'Psyence Fear Mogwai' (and who doesn't?) provides a highpoint slap bang in the middle of the record. The former, unlike the similarly lengthy 'Dex', opens with a much more introspective acoustic piano piece accompanied by gentle guitar before the tempo begins to pick up, threatening to take off before it develops into a King Crimson styled jerky and irregular time pattern and measured play out. The latter, like album opener 'Evoke', is a piece which builds slowly delivering a repetitive and increasingly urgent phrase.

Progressive in its ambition and in the arrangements yet with a contemporary sound, 'Erased By Reason' is, at times, quite compelling and, at other times, thoughtful and meandering. Definitely an album which sits at the outer limits from the core of Melodic and Classic Rock, yet one which will appeal to those who aren't afraid of the challenge when a band comes along and throws down the gauntlet to shift you from your comfort zone.

Mike Ainscoe

PURPURA INK – 'BREAKIN' CHAINS' *(Voice/Wikimetal)* HARD ROCK

With names such as E.J. (vocals), Marcio Glam (guitars, keyboard), Chris Wiesen ((guitars) okay, some normality here), Seth Bass (bass) and Derick (drums) you might be justifiably mistaken for thinking this is some kind of Steel Panther/Spinal Tap outfit. However, Purpura Ink (a name with so many wild and wacky connotations) are the real deal.

They hail from Sao Luis, Brazil, and in case you're wondering; "Purpura" in Portuguese means "Purple" and therefore makes sense, as they are self-proclaimed Deep Purple admirers (their spasmodic, yet intelligent use of peripheral keyboard accompaniments hint towards that very fact) – I'm surmising the "Ink" part of their name relates to tattoos… but I could be wrong.

Just a quick glance at their bio pic would, in itself, propel you back several decades to those heady days of 1980's Hair Metal; a sub-genre that flourished with such Rock/Sleaze/Glam luminaries as Mötley Crüe, Quiet Riot, Van Halen, Ratt, L.A. Guns et al. It was a time of brash attitudes, posturing of the highest order and relatively simplistic songs that could/would batter your brain into delirium. Anyway, enough circumstantial tittle-tattle – what exactly does this debut album have to offer?

Initially expecting very little (shame on me), I was immediately and pleasantly surprised when the title track kicked things into action. 'Breakin' Chains' is a lively, melodic song that has all the ingredients to impress; a satisfying riff, guitar interplay, decent chorus and more than competent vocals from E.J. – the sound feels genuinely organic, and a very good start indeed. The Crüe connection certainly shows itself the moment 'Lifestyle' begins; in fact, it's scarily close to their early 1980's discography and features machine-gun riffing, gang vocals and a catchy chorus. The Crüe-isms continue aplenty with the pedal-to-the-metal 'Enemy', 'Rose With Thorns' and 'Bitter Wishes', but it's all good quality, high octane fayre.

The remainder of the album is dominated by no nonsense Rock 'n' Roll made famous by those aforesaid bands; but Purpura Ink's use of twin guitars appears to increase the overall dynamics and when each guitar break emerges, it's delivered with venom, velocity and verve. They do ease back on the throttle occasionally, and when they do they seem to lose a little of their fire and attitude. That said, the Funky 'Kate' and Bluesy 'Let Me Stay (Go Away)' are still more than adequate songs that highlight a thumping rhythm section which slowly grinds into your very psyche.

Irrespective of your likes or dislikes towards those halcyon days of Hair Metal, I urge you to give this album a chance. It's fun and hard hitting at times, but there's enough melody on display to satisfy even the pinkest and fluffiest amongst you. Enjoyable!!

Dave Crompton

PUSH – 'FRICTION' *(Flying Girl)* HARD ROCK

Push are a four-piece traditional Classic Rock band from the Baltimore/ Washington area of the U.S.A., 'Friction' is their second album following on from their 2011 self-titled debut. The band were formed back in 2003 by main-man Geo DeCampo, who handles vocals and lead guitar as well as being the principal song-writer and also having a hand in production duties.

In the albums attached bio, Push state they are a seasoned Rock band but the rest of the claims in there – that they combine today's modern heavy music with classic guitar hooks – I find way off the mark. What is really on offer is pretty uninspired and dated.

To be fair, opening track 'Take Away' has an up-tempo Hard Rocking riff and a nice lead solo between DeCampo and co-guitarist Joe Holbrook, but the sound has all the production qualities of a 1980's Hair Metal demo. 'Do What You Want' is slow and laboured with alternated distorted and clean vocals, perhaps being the aforementioned "modern" influence.

The faster Hard Rocking tracks such as 'Flying Girl', 'Run Thru The Fire' and 'Angel Of Mercy' are competent enough, but nothing inventive or classy and nothing that hasn't been heard a thousand times before; even DeCampo's vocals barely rise above ordinary.

If it wasn't for the band's U.S. origins, I'd say the overall sound of the album is that of an NWOBHM demo. The tracks on the first 'Metal For Muthas' album from back in 1980 sounded better than this. We could be generous and say that 'Friction' is Push's difficult second album, and admittedly I've not heard the first, but that's the only excuse I can come up with.

Mercifully, the album is just thirty-six minutes and eight tracks long, but even that includes two versions of '…Want'; the other featuring a guest female vocalist. I can happily put up with music that isn't particularly good so long as you can feel some sort of energy or passion that the artists really mean what they are doing.

But regrettably for me, this is dull and lifeless and whilst there must be something to have kept the band going for twelve years, it doesn't seem like there's any heart and soul put into the recording. And that's surely the biggest let down of all.

Ian Parry

PYRAMAZE - 'DISCIPLES OF THE SUN' *(Inner Wound)* POWER METAL

In 2008 Pyramaze released their third album 'Immortal' and after promoting and touring with it, they appeared to just fade away, never to be heard of again - or so we thought.

After multiple line-up changes and a revolving door of singers, the band have finally returned after a seven year absence with 'Disciples Of The Sun'. The new album sees Jacob Hansen (recognised producer for Epica, Primal Fear and Amaranthe, to name but a few) taking up the song-writing, production and guitar duties for the band and his inclusion has revitalised not only the sound of the band, but everything about Pyramaze. This new album could, in effect, be taken as another debut from them and I have to admit, the energy and joie de vivre found throughout its twelve tracks is a thrill to hear.

Listen to the title cut just once and tell me that this doesn't seem/sound like a new band that have just started out. The acute enjoyment they appear to be having as they play the song pushes the track to a climactic ending, which is only the start of the good things to come.

'Back For More', 'Genetic Process', 'Hope Springs Eternal', the brooding 'Unveil' and the skilfully arranged 'When Black Turns To White' are songs that any fan of the Melodic Power Metal genre will want to get to know. But for me, it's not just the songs this time that deserve all the plaudits. It's also the Pyramaze band members themselves, led by Hansen, who have really stepped up to the plate; not only have they given Pyramaze a fresh new start, but they have taken things onto a whole new level. I would honestly say, take a bow Terje Harøy (vocals), Hansen (guitars and bass), Jonah Weingarten (keyboards), Toke Skjønnemand (guitars) and Morten Gade Sørensen (drums).

Let us all hope that Pyramaze, who it would seem now have a steady hand at the rudder, can use 'Disciples Of The Sun' as the building block to go on to the bigger and better things that they always threatened to do, but for some reason never quite achieved. With Hansen's steady leadership, I think things are really looking up for them.

Ian Johnson

RAZZMATTAZZ – 'SONS OF GUNS' *(7-Hard/Good Night Music)* HARD ROCK

German band Razzmattazz is back with their second album, 'Sons Of Guns'. I have to concur with the band's statement that "it's not loud and mundane" (a frequent complaint of mine in Hard Rock) but is "enthralling and groovy". Yes… yes it is.

'Down On My Knees' is full of laid-back, Bluesy Rock 'n' Roll. Vocalist Tom Schaupp has a scratchy but strangely infectious voice and he keeps things fresh and interesting; a real performer. 'Fuck You' really labours over the grooves and hooks; any revenge by this band is going to be delivered slowly and intensely. Throughout, there's this electricity in the music with a sense of conviction in the lyrics and stories they're telling. Schaupp chats flippantly to you in 'Don't Loose My Number' and they build texture precisely and Funkily. And, in case you were wondering, there is a key change and it works great.

'Bang Your Head' is a short and sweet, paired down sing-along relying on the pulsing rhythm section before an equally short but effective solo ripples out. Not every track is an instant winner; 'Kung Fu' and 'Demolition Man' are a couple of the less-catchy pieces, even though all the songs have the groove and character of the band. The vocals have a tendency to stay in a fairly limited range too and. at times. you wonder if you've heard this one before.

'Honey Bunny' has cool attitude and 'Desperado' trades the attitude for something more Western styled and "rough-around-the-edges" before a pumping race-to-the-finish with 'Devil's Crotch'. The closing stages of the final track work the guitar and bass fantastically up to a tight, definitive ending.

There are bits of Buckcherry, ZZ Top and AC/DC all thrown in here, but what really comes through is the at-home nature of the band in the studio; the playing is loose yet technical, relaxed and rhythmically on point. Don't take my word for it though; go listen.

Sophie Brownlee

REACH – 'REACH OUT TO ROCK' *(Sun Hill/Cargo)* HARD ROCK

Sweden is well known for its tight knit music community and healthy Hard Rock music scene. So, it should come as no surprise that a highly talented group of four Rockers would 'Reach Out To Rock' from this country!

Reach are just that; a four-piece consisting of Alex Waghorn, David Jones, Ludvig Turner and Marcus Johansson who have combined their musical talents to create a Hard Rock sound that instantly draws you in. You will find it all here from a pulsating percussion sound that is solidly anchored by a rhythmic bottom end to some tasteful, yet energising, lead riffs. The whole package is topped off by a voice that is both on the husky side, yet towering as well!

These lads mean business! They are out to Rock us – in the most melodious way! The group came in to being in 2012, with drummer Johansson and guitarist Turner as the founding members. The two wanted to do just one thing, to make Melodic Hard Rock that was full of vigour and fluid guitar riffs. Once they found bassist Jones and singing sensation Waghorn, they set about doing just that!

All four are experienced musicians and road warriors and it shows – this debut is a very tight and exact recorded work. It also sounds effortless with each musician sounding like they have been playing for many more years than their actual ages.

'Reach...' is a collection of ten songs that not only showcase the individual musical talent within, but also each of the band member's various influences which all combine brilliantly to create their own sound. This is not a group that copies, but one that is proud of the music they grew up with and have the ability to add a high degree of freshness and originality to it, with toughened melodies that "reach" out and envelope you within a wall of sonic melody.

Reach have enough of that famously mentioned "it" (thanks for not using the "other" phrasing/reference synonymous with a certain TV show – Ed) to take them way above the pack! So go for it – 'Reach Out To Rock' – with this excellent four-piece!

Bruce E.J. Atkinson

REBEL PUNK – 'LOVE & HATE' *(Right Right)* HARD ROCK

It's been a while since there's been an American Pop Punk band that's actually made me stand up and take notice, but California-based Rebel Punk seem to have hit the nail right on the head with this, their debut album.

The thing with great Pop Punk music is that you need a sense of melody combined with a sense of urgency. Sounds simple really, but it's amazing how many bands have trouble making a whole album that sticks to these two simple rules. RP have the sort of style and attitude that reminds me of bands such as Green Day and Bad Religion in their 1990's heyday, churning out an album full of tracks that bounce like crazy whilst still being Punk at their heart.

Vocalist George Palacios has a perfect voice for this sort of thing, very tuneful with a slight rasping edge to it, and the three guys behind him make a beautiful, angry but totally catchy noise. 'Love & Hate' has some impeccable melodies (check out 'I'm Never Coming Home' or opener' I'll Come Around') and more hooks than Mr Grey's dungeon. It gets over the fact that it's nothing new by being an almost perfect example of the genre.

Simply put, take all the classic early adaptors of the Pop Punk genre and chuck 'em in a melting pot and Rebel Punk is what will crawl out of the slime inside. It's not big or clever, it's just pure melody with a serious Punk attitude that will absolutely delight fans of the genre fed up with all the pretty boys who have good tunes but no soul. Buy it, turn it up and dance your ass off.

Alan Holloway

RED – 'OF BEAUTY AND RAGE' *(Essential)* MODERN/ALTERNATIVE

Album number five (not counting the re-working of their fourth album) from Christian Modern Rock band Red and it's something of a return to the style established on the 2006 debut 'End Of Silence' and its 2009 follow-up 'Innocence and Instinct'. The subsequent releases (2011 'Until We Have Faces' and 2013 'Release The Panic') incorporated a number of Industrial and programmed elements that divided opinion amongst their fan base; the band seem to have recognised these indiscretions and concentrated on creating something more in line with what their main audience wants to hear. In fact, some of the concerns aimed at 'Release....' were addressed with the re-mixed and re-calibrated collection of some of the albums tracks featuring the usual Red orchestral embellishments.

'Of Beauty And Rage' was funded by a PledgeMusic campaign and released via producer Rob Graves. Red are now essentially a three-piece featuring Michael Barnes (vocals), Anthony Armstrong (guitars, programming) and Randy Armstrong (bass, piano) with help from drummer Dan Johnson and Graves who provides able support with the more technical sound enhancements. Red's style has always been epic in scope, featuring sweeping orchestrations alongside a barrage of riffs and Barnes' ability to switch between clean and harsh vocals; it is Barnes' performance this time that warrants most recognition. Emotional and charismatic yet angst ridden when required, he lifts the material to something more than average, at the same time complimenting the music as more than just a singer.

STATION – 'DRESSED TO KILL' *(Electric Cheetah)* HARD ROCK

Over the past fifteen years there has been the odd occasion on which something just grabs you and refuses to let go. Pride are a band that springs to mind as possibly the last act to genuinely prove that they had it all (in spades) only to fade away. Now from New York City comes a band that have all the tools, songs, looks and ability; the band is called Station.

Now I for one make no apologies for absolutely loving what Patrick Kearney and his boys do, a riotous mix of Trixter, Kiss and Crazy Lixx all topped with a smile, ripped jeans and big hair. Yes boys and girls, we are right back in 1989 and if you liked your Party Metal or whatever tag was thrown at it back in the day, then look no further because if you, like me, over the years have longed for a band to just do it like they used to back then, then look no further.

'Station' is the self-titled album by this NYC four-piece and it consists of fifteen tracks that are guaranteed to make you feel good, jump about like an idiot, stamp your feet, clap your hands and sing-along at the top of your voice. There can be no hiding from it; any band that combines mid-eighties Kiss, Trixter, a nod to D2, a little Skid Row and perhaps a minor suggestion of the riff sensibility of Dokken is onto a winner.

From the feel good party anthem of 'Everything' or the "fist in the air" strut of 'One And Only', Station can't seem to put a foot wrong. 'Dressed To Kill' is complete CL in their gritty prime, while that more mid-paced tracks such as 'Are You Sleeping Alone' and 'Waiting For You' are born and bred in that eighties splendour when no one was writing ballads like a Hard Rock band.

If this was released at the tail end of the eighties it would have, without doubt, been a massive album given the instant nature of the songs. It would be easy to imagine U.S. radio from coast to coast jumping all over this (hell, they jumped all over Pretty Boy Floyd, Bang Tango and Tuff) and quite honestly if those bands made it, Station would have been a dead cert.

This album is just crying out to be discovered, then played loud all day long to the point that even the neighbours will sing-along; try it and I'll bet I'm right. If you want to party like it's 1989 in 2015 – try this and I am sure you will like it; a sure fire winner!

Kieran Dargan

Following the punchy atmospherics of (proper) album opener 'Impostor' and the brutally addictive 'Shadow And Soul', one or two tracks on this release have a rather close Muse feel in the way they are structured and arranged (check out 'What You Keep Alive' as a good example) but this comparison is not meant to be detrimental in any way. 'Gravity Lies' is both angry and emotive in equal measure and the face melting riffs and incendiary vocals sit nicely next to some subtle acoustics and vocals of a more melodic nature. 'Take Me Over' is probably the most commercial track and would make a great single. The song is direct and the hook simply will not let go.

'Of Beauty And Rage' may be a couple of songs too long for the casual listener but I was never struggling at any time and my interest levels remained high throughout. It would be great to see Red hit the U.K. some time and I think along with Skillet and The Letter Black, they would complete a fantastic touring package... one can only pray.

Dave Bott

RED HOT REBELLION – 'THE MISSION' *(Solid Arts And Science)* HARD ROCK

The second full-length album from Dayton Ohio's Party Rock outfit Red Hot Rebellion brings to mind smoke-filled, biker bars resplendent with biker gang memorabilia and the cursory brawl.

It's an album full of dirty riffs, throaty gang vocals and the odd foray into twelve-bar Boogie. 'Alright Alright' has all the subtly of a Harley Davidson driving through the middle of your lounge, whilst the Motörhead meets Danko Jones tones of 'Prepare To Be Destroyed' or 'You Bring The Thunder, I'll Bring The Lightning' are sweaty and honest.

'The Mission' may not be an album for music connoisseurs, but there's certainly a place for music that's as thumping and honest as this.

Mike Newdeck

ROCKSTAR FRAME – 'ROCK 'N' ROLL MAFIA' *(Musicarchy Media)* HARD ROCK

Born of out adversity, Rockstar Frame are a band who evolved following drummer Max Klein's re-emergence from a coma and the belief in the healing powers of Rock music which brought him round. Fittingly, the debut album from the Milan-based, Female-Fronted five-piece is a true celebration. To coin a phrase, the band are on a roll (they are big in Italy having won the national "Rock The Road Contest" against seventy other acts) and being fronted by the distinctive vocal tones of Faith Blurry, you can perhaps appreciate why they make such an impact.

RF are sassy and sleazy with a confidence which recalls some of the big haired American Glam Rockers in their upfront brash attitude – think Poison and Guns 'N' Roses and you're on the right page. Kicking off things with 'Guilty' and the single 'She's Hot' gives the immediate impression that this is going to be a set of fast, frenzied and bold "no nonsense" Rock songs. Fifteen songs in less than an hour means they don't hang about. With the emphasis on turning a song round in under four minutes, there's little time for indulgence – just hard hitting urgency and direct impact.

Throughout there are impressive touches of keys from the splendidly named Ace Wave which complement the chording and picked melodious guitar work and give the sound an element of depth and the occasional keyboard showcase – something pushing beyond the general Hard Rock base.

There are a couple of breaks for some slower paced material in 'Song For You' which has a more commercial acoustic/electric guitar and piano element (which would actually sound nice as an unplugged arrangement) plus the piano and string led 'Fairytale'.

Beyond that, the songs continue to hit hard, one after another – any number of tracks could fit the bill as potential singles or act to showcase Rockstar Frame to a wider audience;

'Poison' is a swaggering Rock tune and there's a terrific screeching wah-wah solo in 'Lie' whilst the title track plays out the album artwork with added sound-bites.

If I was to cherry pick one item from the album it would be 'Twisted Double Nature'; a totally catchy power Rock song subtly underpinned again by a bubbly synth – if you listen to just one song from the album, this is it.

To be picky, on the questionable side, some might find the previously mentioned, slightly dubious artwork and a couple of songs titles like 'Cherry Boobs' and 'I Don't Give A Fuck' lapsing into the stereotypical and clichéd, but let it not detract from an album which has a lot going for it.

Mike Ainscoe

ROOM EXPERIENCE – 'ROOM EXPERIENCE' *(MelodicRock)* MELODIC ROCK

Room Experience (really... are ALL the cool names actually gone?) is the brainchild of Italian keyboardist/vocalist Gianluca Firmo and David Readman (Pink Cream 69); it also features a smattering of guests including the likes of Alessandro Del Vecchio and Sven Larsson (Street Talk, Shining Line) lending their talents to the project.

Kicking off with 'Shock Me', it's apparent that RE are operating in the European Melodic Rock field not a million miles away from Readman's main gig with PC69, although perhaps not as aggressive and leaning much closer towards a more AOR-like sound.

'Queen Of Every Heart' and 'One Way Out' solidifies this thought, however it's on the album's remaining tracks that it becomes more than apparent. Whilst Firmo and Readman have an unashamed love of power chords, they are not afraid to tread a softer line on this album with some stunning examples of AOR balladry such as 'Run To You', 'Another Day Without You', 'The Only Truth' and 'Rainbow In The Rain'.

If you have ever wondered what Readman would sound like singing and taking a much more AOR-based approach, well here is the answer and the wait has been worth it. Despite travelling a heavier road with the Pinkies, Readman has all the power and delivery of a master and I for one cannot fault his delivery on anything here.

Apart from perhaps one or two tracks that fall into the filler category, this album (from start to finish) is as enjoyable as hell and definitely contains a Eurovision winner or two – apparently the power ballad is back in Eurovision and as far as power ballads go, RE reel them off for fun.

This may be only the debut album from Room Experience but I definitely look forward to a second album.

Kieran Dargan

S.A.Y. – 'ORION' *(MelodicRock)* MELODIC ROCK

It is kind of difficult to put a handle on this one; Swedish – check, melodic – check, Hard Rock – check, AOR – check. Considering almost everything coming out of Sweden these days is either high-tech AOR in the vein of Work Of Art and Care Of Night or Melodic Hard Rock in the vein of Eclipse and H.e.a.t, I felt it wise to state from the outset that S.A.Y. tread their own path, with just a hint of everything name-checked above.

As its Swedish, it's good. Yes, plain and simple, that's the way it is these days. Once upon a time you could buy an album from a particular label and have a damn good idea what would be on offer, these days, if it's Melodic Rock and it's Swedish, it's invariably very good.

The marvellous 'Crash And Burn' – think The Magnificent – is glorious Riff Rock all topped off with wonderful vocals. The stratospheric 'Heroes' sees vocalist Peter Grundstrom, putting it simply, off the scale delving into territory previously only occupied by Tony Harnell. Another notable entry is 'Dream On' which pays more than a passing nod to 'Forever Shine On' (TNT) from the perspective of the vocal melody, but even then it still stands on its own two feet as a "fist in the air", head-shaking Rocker.

Special mention must go to the cheesy as hell 'Eight Hundred Miles' with it's almost Eurovision chorus; but as cheesy as it is, it's one of those songs that somehow ingrains itself into the subconscious and refuses to go away.

S.A.Y. may be a new project for Grundstrom and Jan Akesson, however with a six album history as Stone Lake behind them (between 2006 and 2013), I will certainly be checking out this aforementioned outfit as the musical class on show here is simply too good to ignore. A rather fabulous little album that is well deserving of a home in your collection

Kieran Dargan

SALEM HILL – 'THE UNSEEN CORD – THICKER THAN WATER' *(Lazarus Group)* PROGRESSIVE

It's been a long wait for the follow-up to 2010's 'Pennies In The Karma Jar' album, initial plans were scuppered by a serious car accident involving Carl Groves' two eldest daughters; the topic featuring in the closing track, 'Noon'. Thankfully, they recovered and the band set about creating their ninth studio opus.

They feel this is their most emotionally poignant work since 1998's 'The Robbery Of Murder', and I have to concur. One thing's assured with Salem Hill, lyrically they won't be "run of the mill" and that stories will unfold. It'll come as no surprise that diverse subject matter includes suicide and Karen Carpenter.

Opening song, 'Float' is a tribute to Carpenter and her tragic story. Lovely piano gives way to Wurlitzer Electric Piano. The vocal arrangements are stunning, as they are across the entire album. It helps that all four members sing, the others being Michael Dearing, Patrick Henry (bass) & Kevin Thomas (drums). This aspect of their performance puts me in mind of Moon Safari, who represents a pretty fair comparison. Hammond Organ and more piano provide a lovely instrumental backdrop and there are short but sweet guitar solos too. Quite a start!

I've found the seemingly U.S. Prog centric trait of syncopation and staccato delivery a little distracting in SH's work, but they seem to have reined that aspect in and concentrated on wonderful melodies and refrains.

'Sing On' was written many years ago; it's a jaunty number, acoustic guitar driven with hints of Bluegrass in places. An A Cappella section further enhances the MS comparison. 'Butterfly' is a delightful mid-paced song, despite the lyrical contents; it has a wonderful piano theme and a great chorus. Once again the vocal arrangement is exceptional and the unfussy guitar solo fits perfectly.

'Hurt' is about suicide. It has recent Spock's Beard sensibilities with the guitar riff, vocal style and phrasing being redolent until the chorus which moves into MS territory. The upbeat nature of the music belies the lyrics. The appearance of vibraphone is both left-field and enjoyable and the extended instrumental section is pure Prog. 'Holding On (Happy Hands)' started as an instrumental only at the eleventh hour did Dearing add words. Heralded by Indian style drumming, it picks up tempo and again puts me in mind of SB. The melody is terrific.

'So Much More' features lovely piano work and delightful orchestration; the chorus hits the spot. Delicious fret-less bass adds flavour and the synth solo is subtly good. The epic 'Noon', all twenty-eight minutes of it, closes out the album. It runs the full gamut of styles and emotions not least the Pink Floyd-ish opening

Gary Marshall

SEXPLOSION – 'SWALLOW 'N' SHUT UP??' *(Warner Music Spain)* HARD ROCK

Now let's be honest here – one look at the name and title and you thought "utter twats" didn't ya? I know I did because I'm really tired of misogynistic Sleaze bands who think that this shit is still acceptable and/or amusing. Still, I've dug a few gems out of the filth in the past so decided to actually have a listen instead of just writing a Spinal Tap-inspired review that simply said "shitsplosion".

Dammit… I have to admit I like this album. Good Sleaze is always lots of fun and Sexplosion certainly fall comfortably into that bracket. Just check out opener 'Bitch House' (really!?) on YouTube and you'll find a high energy song that wouldn't be out of place on a classic Mötley Crüe album. The ballad 'Just Fight' gives me Skid Row chills and even if G Starless isn't up to Seb Bach's standards, he does a good, raspy job.

The album is overflowing with upbeat party tunes with great, crunchy riffs and catchy hooks. It's not perfect and can get a little samey at times, but there's nothing here that has been beaten with the shitty stick (although perhaps whoever came up with the band name and album title should be).

So there you go – Spanish Sleaze seraphim Sexplosion certainly don't suck. Down and very dirty indeed, they rise above all expectations and have produced a Sleaze Rock album that will delight anyone that thinks all guitarists should play with a lit fag hanging off of one lip or that bandannas are cool.

See you down the front as I bet they really kick ass live!

Alan Holloway

SHAWN JAMES & THE SHAPESHIFTERS – 'THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO...' *(Independent)* HARD ROCK

Shawn James & The Shapeshifters are a five-piece Rock band from Fayetteville, Arkansas. At first glimpse, you might confuse them with a Bluegrass band as they include fiddle and plucking banjo in their musical mix.

'Like Father Like Son' is a proper "Swampland Rock" track complete with snorting vocals and a banjo straight from hell. The mix of fiddle and droning guitar, drenched in some mean Blues, gives 'Lost' a sound like a dying mans lament.

There is a real authenticity to the vocal work in 'Lake Of Fire' which trickles along in a beautifully tragic stream of discontented waters with no end in sight, with only the short fiddle solo offering any release from the pain.

'Back Down', with its punishing guitar work, reminded me of Clutch while the vocals leave an empty feeling in your soul. 'The Sandbox' is a song that grows slowly into a monster

STEVEN WILSON – 'HAND.CANNOT.ERASE.' *(KScope)* PROGRESSIVE

Modern Progressive Rock has some extraordinary talent, whether we're talking Anathema, Amplifier, Opeth or any of the many and varied faces of Steven Wilson. Arguably, however, it is still looking for its 'Dark Side Of The Moon'; an album that will capture the current zeitgeist, speak to the dispersed Prog hordes and give the genre focus and cohesion.

Inspired by the puzzling and tragic death of Joyce Vincent, 'Hand.Cannot.Erase.' is a gripping and moving study of isolation and loneliness in the modern age. It offers a cautionary tale and pause for thought for us all. It's also, I believe, Wilson's finest and most consistent solo album. He has pulled off the seemingly impossible feat of producing a Progressive Rock album that is accessible and engaging without sacrificing any of its breadth or ambition.

As if to prove the point, the title track is admirably melodic and concise, while the more casual listener might also be directed to the gorgeous ambience of 'Perfect Life'. The shorter tracks nestle comfortably alongside the more extended numbers. '3 Years Older' may clock in at over ten minutes, but it doesn't waste a second of its running time. Only on the thirteen minute 'Ancestral' is there any hint of indulgence on an album that feels pointed, focused and economical throughout.

The composition draws from a broad palate of musical styles and influences, with the virtuoso band assembled by Wilson (Marco Minnemann, Guthrie Govan, Nick Beggs and Adam Holzman – the core line-up from 2013's 'Raven' album) turning in a faultless performance and working with Wilson to create something truly special. Special too are the vocals of Ninet Tayeb and the voice of Katherine Jenkins which bring added poignancy to the album's characters and themes.

For anyone following and relating to the lyrics, the parting shot and, indeed, title of main album closer 'Happy Returns' seems to leaves open the possibility of different endings to the real life fate suffered by Vincent, who died alone in her flat of presumed natural causes and lay undiscovered for over two years. It's a point of departure that helps keep the album personal to the listener while simultaneously extending its potential reach.

Can it reach and engage with listeners in sufficient numbers to become genuinely "genre-defining"? It's not as easy these days as it was for the likes of Pink Floyd or Genesis to produce such an album – the music industry, like much of modern life, has become fragmented or only superficially connected.

However, 'Hand.Cannot.Erase' is certainly one of the finest examples you'll hear of contemporary Progressive Rock at its most creative, thought provoking, melancholic and musically inspiring. Essential listening!

Michael Anthony

of epic proportions, thanks to the weathered tones of singer Shawn James.

There are a great many bands drinking from the Blues Rock musical well, Shawn James & The Shapeshifters have the foresight to try a great many new musical ideas, which has given this band a diverse collection of inspired songs.

Ray Paul

SILENTLIE – 'LAYERS OF NOTHING' *(Bakerteam)* HARD ROCK

Although they have been together as a band for almost a decade, 'Layers Of Nothing' represents Silentlie's debut album with just a couple of EP's released along the way. Formed in Italy in 2005, Silentlie originally followed a more Gothic path inspired by the likes of Nightwish and their ilk. Although those Gothic elements are still present, 'Layers...' treads a more Hard Rock line than those initial influences.

This is a decent effort for a first album with some good ideas running throughout the release. 'Invisible Fall', with a riff that wouldn't be out of place on a HIM record, and the album closer 'Dark Nights' retain those Gothic elements while toughening things up with some sharp riffs.

Musically there are some strong performances; the fine crunching riffs on 'Slave' being an album highlight as is the cataclysmic Black Sabbath-like riffage of 'Change' which is made all the better by some sinister keyboards that assist in creating something dark and moody.

If anything it is the vocals of Giorgia Sacco Taz that disappoint, particularly in the lower register where they just end up a touch flat and lifeless. Yet when she hits the mid to upper ranges, things markedly improve so maybe on the next album they should play to her vocal strengths.

Overall, this is a reasonable first attempt and there are plenty of positives particularly in the musical ideas and performances from the band. If they can concentrate on the vocals more next time, they might make just more of an impact.

Mick Burgess

SIRENIA – 'THE SEVENTH LIFE PATH' *(Napalm)* SYMPHONIC METAL

As some of you may have easily worked out, the Reviews Ed and I share an enthusiasm for the Female-Fronted bands, especially those in the Symphonic and Gothic Rock/Metal spectrum. However, the new album by Sirenia, entitled 'The Seventh Life Path', has caused a bit of debate between us as to whether it should actually be featured in the first place. Strange I know given all their recent albums have featured in this magazine at one time or another.

The consternation arose from that fact that, on this latest release, not only have the dreaded grunts/growls returned (which if used for effect we/I have no problem with), but they have come back in abundance and we weren't sure if fans old or new would appreciate this. We concluded a review might help people to make their minds up so here we are.

The music itself is just what you'd expect from this great band; it is forceful, dark, full of fury and attitude and it is a tour-de-force in Gothic Metal and that usually would be that – all would be good. However on nearly every track found on '...Path' (and in a couple of instances we are talking whole songs) there are grunts and growls to be found on them.

As stated above, when used to enhance a song or for dramatic effect, growls in somejsutforms of music do have their place. On '...Path', as much as I actually like the songs/music, the grunts did start to grate after a while and you begin to wish that the band had let their singer (Ailyn) do her thing, all by herself, a little more often.

The growls put to one side, we find that Sirenia have created a Symphonic Monster that has sweeping vistas that open onto musical landscapes encompassing everything from outright Metal to wispy ethereal Prog. Songs such as 'Serpent', 'Once My Light' 'Elixir', 'Insania' (thankfully not the Peter Andre monstrosity) and 'The Silver Eye' are all well worth a listen.

Personally I enjoyed listening to most of this album, but those of you of a gentler musical persuasion might not enjoy the increased use of grunts and growls that pervade throughout these songs. On the whole, I personally could have done with less of them myself but this is still a very good album and one that shouldn't be ignored just because of their use.

Truly a case of try it for yourself before you decide.

Ian Johnson

SYMPHONY X – 'UNDERWORLD' *(Nuclear Blast)* PROGRESSIVE

It's been four long years since the last Symphony X release 'Iconoclast'. But now I have their brand new album 'Underworld' in my greedy little hands and to tell you the honest to goodness truth, it is everything I hoped it would be and so much more.

With blistering guitar, bass guitar runs, drums that shake the walls of your house, keyboards that resonate with force and intensity along with vocals that will destroy at ten paces, you know that after just one listen that 'Underworld' is the perfect way for them to make their return. Now those few factors I've already mentioned should, on their own, be enough to make you want to part with your hard earned money. But also having ten amazing songs (eleven if you count the intro) provides you with the proverbial icing on the cake.

'Underworld' isn't a concept album per se but instead it builds on themes of darkness and emotion that were inspired by Michael Romeo's reading of 'Dante's Inferno'. The idea of Hell, reclamation and Dante's use of the number three (and its multiples) are all used throughout the album and you'll enjoy discovering these complexities for yourself. The songs therefore aren't easy (at first) to get to grips with, having many layers of intricacy running through them. You have to sit down and really listen to what SyX have created on this release before you truly understand what's going on. When you do, be ready for some of the most intense music this band has ever released.

The album starts with the razor sharp riffage of 'Nevermore' and the stunning title track where keyboard player Michael Pinnella puts in a master class in how to create atmosphere and depth with his playing. These precede the lighter yet truly striking 'Without You' where Russell (God) Allen shows just why he's considered one of the best singers on the planet. Then, from this incredible beginning, the band continues to build the musical drama and mood that they have begun.

You'll find the likes of 'Charon', about the boatman for the dead which keeps the 'Underworld' theme going, the ten minute majesty of 'To Hell And Back' which is just simply breathtaking and my own personal favourite 'Swan Song' where Allen, Romeo, Pinnella, Michael LePond and Jason Rullo combine to create one of this band's most complete and intoxicating songs.

There are only handful of bands working today who can make albums of such beauty and grace, who can combine great musicianship and complex arrangements with accessible songs. I'm thankful that Symphony X are one of them and this could easily be the best Melodic/Progressive Metal album I've heard this year; a spectacular triumph.

Ian Johnson

SKIP ROCK – 'TAKE IT OR LEAVE IT' *(Street Dog)* HARD ROCK

It's time for some good ol' cowboy/outlaw biker Hard Rock courtesy of the German band led by Marc Terry, who's previously written songs for Paul Di'Anno. It's the kind of music that goes down a bomb at the plethora of German summer festivals that attract the large biker fraternity that shoot up and down that country's Autobahns.

Song like 'Death Or Glory' and the slightly naff 'Motorcycle Man II' are written specifically for bikers and would sound best at one of those aforementioned festivals with a cold beer in one hand and a Bratwurst in the other.

There's a Spaghetti Western feel to the intro complete with its Morricone style whistle. 'Jesse James' starts off as a campfire, Country Rocker before it moves into a faster, bucking bronco chorus and the Heavy Rock of 'Tell Me Why' operates in similar territory to the superior Devil's Train.

Where it falls down, at times, is Terry's vocals; while his riffs pack a punch, his singing is too mannered and overly gruff in places (particularly on the duet 'Too Young' – a ballad with Gaby Weihmayer). I'm not sure about the heavily accented "yeh haw" on '...James' either. The rather good 'Rich 'N' Nazty' falters because it uses the word "stinky" in the chorus which is unintentionally funny.

However, all of that's more or less forgiven because the riffs stoke the flames and lead guitarist Darius Dee Rocks hard and fluidly, with some good, finger lickin' solos and at their best, the music can remind you of American Dog or Nashville Pussy.

On the evidence here, their best forum would be live supporting more established bands as their hard riffs are broad enough in appeal to go down well with any Rock crowd and the vocal eccentricities wouldn't be as pronounced as they are on this studio recording.

Not ground breaking but good, mindless fun.

Duncan Jamieson

SOLEY MOURNING – 'THE ROCKET POOL' *(Independent)* ROCK

Black Country Classic Rockers Soley Mourning are fast becoming one of my favourite bands. I'm a little late to the party as their new album, 'The Rocket Pool', is actually their fourth release, they've already toured with Magnum (how did I miss that!) and the ultra professional production and recording was supplied by the ever reliable team at Wolverhampton's Mad Hat studios. How these guys are not better known is a complete and utter mystery to me!

'...Pool' is a powerfully impressive album of swaggering Classic Rock with an energetic groove and large dollops of smooth melodies. SM are far from "yet another" Classic Rock band; their heavy use of melody veers them away from the grit and grime of their contemporaries giving them a unique and commercial edge. Vocalist Mat Partridge still has that Blues tone to his voice but he's not afraid to diversify his style to suit a more melodic vibe. The guitar riffs and licks provided by Andy Guest and Tony Chambers are far more technical and melodic than you'd expect from your average Classic Rock band.

The level of musicianship throughout the band is of an extremely high calibre and these guys really deserve a higher profile as they put many so called "professional bands" to shame. Not only do these guys sound and perform like the real deal, they can also write a tune that sticks in your mind and makes a big impression, and as well as penning a quality guitar hook and a vocal melody that gets under your skin, they can also write a decent lyric to go with it.

I have to give them a "high five" for working the word "kecks" (local slang for underwear) in 'Shark Eyes' much to my amusement, but that aside, when you listen to the thought provoking lyrics of 'The Unmaking Of A Rational Mind' you realise these guys aren't just pretty faces. The likes of 'Accidental Enemies' connects not just on a lyrical level but also in it's easy and infectious swagger that makes it such an enjoyable song. The heartfelt ballad 'So Long Song' highlights a softer side to the band.

It's a crying shame Soley Mourning aren't already dusting it up with the big boys championed by the likes of Classic Rock, but I'm sure these Black Country boys will be showing them how it's done in the very near future. If swaggering Rock and Roll with a strong melodic sensibility Rocks your world, then prepare yourself to be mightily impressed with 'The Rocket Pool'. But I must admit, I'm still incredulous it's taken me this long to discover such an awesome band who are literally from my back yard.

Paul Woodward

SONNY LANDRETH – 'BOUND BY THE BLUES' *(Provogue)* BLUES/SOUL

Returning to the Blues after his last album, the Classical, Jazz Fusion of 'Elemental Journey', the veteran guitarist Sonny Landreth is on fine form with a set of original and classic covers. With forays in the recent past into Jazz, Zydeco, Folk and Country music, the hardcore Blues fan might not always be feeling they're getting enough Blues for their buck. But 'Bound By The Blues' is, in essence, a complete Blues record with some inflections from other genres, but not overpowered by them.

Landreth's Blues is not the hot and sweaty variety, it doesn't come huffing and puffing at your front door; it slips in the backdoor, mellower than your average Blues cat. The covers, such as 'Walkin' Blues' and 'Cherry Ball Blues', are perfect for those hours in the summer on the back porch, nursing a cold beer, watching the sun start to go down while the pots are bubbling in the kitchen.

His signature slide guitar playing works its slow, languid magic, making everything, no matter how Blue the lyrics get, sound as if nothing life can throw at Landreth will faze him.

THE RIPTIDE MOVEMENT – 'GETTING THROUGH' *(Caroline/Universal)* ROCK

Okay, so just who are The Riptide Movement? Well, the answer is four Irish musicians just trying to get through to you! Are they? I mean are they 'Getting Through'? I tell you what, they certainly are to me!

In recent years, a number of groups have emerged from Ireland – and all more than good. However none are quite like TRM which is made up of four very creative, very talented musicians; this band is then completed (on this release anyway) with horns and strings. The music they make is Rock 'n' Roll, combined with more than a spattering of Irish traditional rhythms! The core members of TRM are Gar Byrne on drums/Piano, John Dalton on guitars, Gerard McGarry on bass/harmonica and Mal Tuohy also on guitar. They all contribute towards the vocals with Tuohy taking the lead.

In addition to the musical contributions of these four musicians, as already mentioned, '...Through' also features horns and strings too – thanks to nine visiting musicians playing an array of instruments. We have trumpets, trombones and a cello! We also hear more layered vocals, of course under the direction of the core four! The writing and composition is superb – the end result being a splendid collection of raucous Rock 'n' Roll!

TRM are a unique ensemble of musicians that know how to make "good time" music yet can still create some more serious and moody pieces. The group are by no means "strangers" in their homeland. Having been together for about eight years, this record will be their fourth, but the first to take them out of the Emerald Isle. They are road worthy players and singers and know their way around a stage – not afraid to play the small pubs and clubs but be equally comfortable on a big stage. The music will also be able to fill those bigger venues as the sound on '...Through' is full, rich and tight. Vocally, the group shine with lyrics that are thoughtful and straight forward yet Tuohy doesn't "mince" his words. He sings it like it is and the rest play it the same!

I could play the "sounds like" game, but I won't. Why? Well because their writing and playing are both so fresh that I think comparing them to others would be a disservice. On this one just trust me! For a fiery & raucous romp through the finest Rootsy Rock 'n' Roll, it has to be The Riptide Movement! Am I 'Getting Through' yet?

Bruce E.J. Atkinson

The band are so well drilled, competent and professional you could term some of the material here, especially the covers, as jaunty.

You also get Landreth's Americana side on the cool 'The High Side' which wouldn't have sounded out of place on one of his previous collaborations with John Hiatt. Then tracks like 'Where They Will' and 'Simcoe Street' add a late night Blues Noir feel to the proceedings and the only instrumental track, 'Firebird Blues', crackles like a fish-fryer on the Bayou.

The title track is a robust number about the power of the Blues to unite – "sisters and brothers of every colour…bound by the Blues". The emotional connection the Blues is able to achieve shouldn't be underestimated in bringing races together in recent American history.

Fans of the man should snap this one up and his causal listeners can rest assured this one isn't trying to take the Blues too far from its source. This massages the tension out of your Blues bones nicely.

Duncan Jamieson

SORCERER – 'IN THE SHADOW OF THE INVERTED CROSS' *(Metal Blade)* HEAVY METAL

It's not very often in the cut-throat world of music that a huge miscarriage of justice gets a chance to be rectified – in recent times I can only think of one other case (that of U.K. Metaller's Hell) – but after being the stuff of myth and legend for so long, Swedish Epic/Progressive Doom Metal act Sorcerer finally get to release their official debut album!

Formed in Stockholm in the late 1980s, the band (which incidentally features vocalist Anders Engberg of Lion's Share, Therion and 220 Volt (amongst others) fame) recorded a couple of highly prized demo tapes – 'Sorcerer' in 1989 and 'The Inquisition' which arrived some three years later – both of which actually sold better than a lot of band's albums at the time. Often likened to both Candlemass and Solitude Aeturnus – personally speaking, I'd throw Tony Martin era Black Sabbath and maybe a soupçon of Veni Domine into the mix as well – for some completely inexplicable reason they never got signed (despite near universal rave reviews). As a consequence, the various members drifted apart into other projects with the Sorcerer name ultimately passing into the realm of legends.

Both demos were re-issued on CD in 1995 (and then again as an expanded version in 2011 – if you can find a copy, their version of 'Stargazer' alone make it worth the entrance fee!), but after bassist Johnny Hagel was contacted about reforming the band to play the Hammer Of Doom Festival in Germany in 2010, they decided to give it another shot. A real labour of love, 'In The Shadow Of The Inverted Cross' has taken more than two years to write and record, but the end results are nothing short of breath-taking!

This is a humongous, riff strewn monster of an album with superb vocals (I'm assuming no one actually needs me to eulogise on how good a singer Engberg is?), massive hooks, epic arrangements and seismic guitar flurries. I'm not kidding when I say this is arguably the best release of its type since the seminal 'Nightfall' from Candlemass back in 1987! Filled to the gunnels with epic arrangements, the eight tracks (most of which clock in at the six to eight minute mark) that make up the album serve up a veritable aural banquet of everything that's great about this particular branch of the Metal tree … bold, ambitious, soaring and majestic.

But don't just take my word for it, emerge your senses in gems such as 'Prayers For A King', 'Sumerian Script', 'Lake Of The Lost Souls', the title track 'In The Shadow Of The Inverted Cross' itself or the pulsing 'The Gates Of Hell' and experience the imperial majesty of Sorcerer for yourself.

Absolutely awesome!

Dave Cockett

SPITFIRE – 'WELCOME TO BONE CITY' *(Rookies And Kings)* HARD ROCK

Welcome one and all to Bone City, "the most fucked-up place you've ever been" according to the spoken word intro that opens this album. This sets the scene for a concept of sorts that journeys through the dark alleyways and seedy underworld of the city of the title, spawning along the way stories like 'Last Gang In Town', 'Motorman', 'Bone City Radio' and 'Bridges Burned'.

The German trio, vocalist/guitarist Dick Dropkick, bassist Johnny Jailbreak and drummer Nikk Nitro (of course they are their real names!) shout, swear and snarl through fourteen aggressively rebellious three to four minute Metal anthems with a Punky, snot-nosed attitude and make one hell of a big sound for a three-piece. The incessant and sometimes unnecessary swearing does become a little tiresome after a while, but the big choruses make up for it and keep some of the interest.

You'll find elements of Motörhead, The Ramones, Guns 'N' Roses and The Almighty, the latter somewhat enforced by Dropkick's voice having a certain resemblance to one Ricky Warwick, especially on the album's solitary "quieter" number 'Battlefield" (though in no way is it a ballad). There's even a cover of Kenny Loggins' 'Danger Zone' (from the 'Top Gun' soundtrack) included as a bonus track which is actually pretty decent.

Good fun, but in a non-essential way.

Ant Heeks

STARQUAKE – 'TIMES THAT MATTER' *(Pure Rock)* PROGRESSIVE

Formed around vocalist Mikey Wenzel, Starquake earned their chops on the live circuit before releasing this record. Opener 'Scenes From A Revolution' is an ambitious and challenging start – weighing in at a hefty eight minutes, it begins with a keyboard intro before exploding into an Iron Maiden-like Rocker. Wenzel does a decent Bruce Dickinson-esque vocal, although on the higher notes I found him a bit grating. I do, however, think the same about Dickinson so that might be a bit of a back handed compliment! After the initial onslaught, the song meanders into an atmospheric middle section featuring sampled speech from history regarding revolutions, before Wenzel comes back to sing a gentle, lilting second part. The keyboards and guitars then get their chance to take centre stage, before the track eventually finds its way back to how it started. Phew!

'Close Encounter' covers the subject of UFOs in the style of Deep Purple with its liberal use of Hammond Organ. 'I'm Goin' Mad (You Comin'?)' features a disturbing falsetto, xylophone and garbled backing vocals which, I assume, are meant to represent madness, but to me just sounded like a cacophony. Mercifully this track is only three and a half minutes, but Wenzel redresses that balance with the twenty minute epic 'Rise And Fall.' That too moves through a variety of different segments before eventually returning to how it started.

The other tracks are mostly straightforward Rock fare, like 'Here I Go Again' (not the Whitesnake one) and the distorted but punchy 'The Needle Lies', while the acoustic-based 'Whatever' offers a nice change of pace. Wenzel can't resist one more epic to close the album though, with the jolly piano intro of 'Fairytale' luring you into a sprawling seven minute plus journey, which moves from power ballad, to an acoustic, almost Folk guitar part with David Bowie like vocals, before the song seems to end…then a "secret" track leaps out. It's an amusing, if somewhat insane, little ditty which spouts abuse at someone who has wronged the singer, before it erupts into a down-tuned Metal drone with growled vocals. I don't know the name of this extra track, so I just called it 'What The Fuck?'

When I'd finished listening to the album, "what the fuck?" was pretty much my view of it. There's so many ideas, so many things to take in (many of them in the same song!) I don't know what to make of it. Rodney Matthews provided the album art and it has a Prog look to it, and maybe that's why I didn't get on with it. If you do like Prog, Metal and variety, you might enjoy this. For me, it was too much.

James Gaden

STELLAR REVIVAL – 'LOVE, LUST AND BAD COMPANY' *(Southern Gentlemen)* MODERN/ALTERNATIVE

In 2011 Stellar Revival signed to EMI Capitol and were touted as the next big thing. The label backed the band, building a following for them (through touring) prior to the release of their debut album. The band worked with producer Brian Howes to complete said album, even playing the Download Festival in 2012 and put out the first single 'The Crazy Ones'.

Vocalist Rino Cerbone had initially given up working for the family pizza business to have a tilt at the big time after having some success locally with its forerunner Copasetic. The future looked bright, but then EMI Capitol decided to delay the release of the album again and again culminating in withdrawing the support for the band and cancelling the release indefinitely, despite a concerted Twitter protest from fans.

Fast forward four years after the album was recorded and the label agreed to let the band have it and it gains release through their own label. Why on earth an album of this quality was never released defies logic, but I suspect EMI Capitol would claim restructuring and the global recession.

For those who adore bands like Black Stone Cherry, prime time Hinder or even 'Light It Up' era Rev Theory, this album will quite possibly be one of the best that you will ever hear. Howes' signature stamp is all over this album sonically and '...Ones' combines all those bands into one song.

'The Bottom Line' gives BSC a run for their money whilst Cerbone's vocals give the slow burning heaviness of 'Heart To Stone' a RT edge. 'Shattered' – SR's answer to Hinder's 'Lips Of An Angel' – and the quite phenomenal 'Cross Your Heart (And Hope To Die)' provide the necessary lighter-waving moments whilst the frenetic title track and 'Edge Of A Dream' provide the necessary Rock backbone.

The quality of this album is what defines it; there is no filler whatsoever throughout the eleven tracks which is a rarity in this day and age. Even the bonus tracks are worth having with acoustic versions of a couple of the songs together with some early demos that put other band's finished work to shame (Yes Hinder I mean you).

In the Modern Melodic Rock genre, this stands head and shoulders above almost everything that I've heard. 'Love, Lust And Bad Company' is a gem of an album and a forgotten classic and it remains utterly criminal that this record has remained buried for four years. The whole saga provides yet another reason why the music industry remains as clueless as ever about good music.

(Stellar Revival has now called it a day but several members now appear in the band Southern Gentlemen.)

Mike Newdeck

STEVE HUGHES – 'TALES FROM THE SILENT OCEAN' *(Festival)* PROGRESSIVE

Steve Hughes may not be a well-known name but he has a significant pedigree having been the drummer with Big Big Train between 1991 and 2007; within this period he also filled the same role with The Enid and was stand-in drummer with "super-group" Kino. He's also undertaken numerous sessions over his career which now takes a new turn as he comes out from behind his kit to write and perform his own material.

The theme of the album is of a troubled journalist who succumbs to manic depression; the story looking at how this impacts his life and marriage. Sean Filkins (ex-BBT) provides some of the lyrics plus lead vocal contributions on four of the eleven tracks; in addition there are three female lead vocalists, Ezzy Anya, Natasha Chomyn and Angie Hughes all of whom are new names to me.

The album was mastered by noted producer Simon Hanhart (Marillion, Saxon, amongst many others) so sonically it's extremely good. Needless to say the drumming is pretty spectacular throughout but Hughes also demonstrates considerable prowess on a number of instruments not least the keyboards where he delivers any number of terrific solos. Also of note is some fine guitar work from J.C. Strand plus some beautiful orchestral arrangements and many splendid vocal arrangements, particularly when the female voices are in evidence.

A pitfall in the Prog genre can be artists being too eclectic with too many time and tempo changes which results in a lack of cohesion; on the face of it that could be levelled here as there's considerable variety across the eleven tracks. However, in this case, these changes in mood have been very well managed therefore the music flows in a very natural and sympathetic way rather than feeling as if disparate chunks of music have been randomly thrown together.

Comparisons are plentiful and I could trot out all the familiar, classic Prog names including BBT. But in places I'm reminded of early Marillion (particularly vocally) whilst at others bands such as Rush come to mind along with some modern influences thanks to the use of sequencers, processed vocals and drum & bass style beats.

I can't hope to tell you about each of the tracks because there is so much to say about them; suffice to say there's not a weak song on show, all are beautifully crafted and the balance between light and shade, heavy and delicate is something special.

As debuts go this is extremely impressive, making Steve Hughes a name to look out for in the future. I have no hesitation in saying that if you like Prog then you will really love this album.

Gary Marshall

STEVE 'N' SEAGULLS – 'FARM MACHINE' *(Spinefarm)* SOUTHERN/COUNTRY/FOLK

Hayseed Dixie have carved out a successful career with their Hillbilly versions of Rock classics, so it was inevitable that other acts would employ the same tactic. Enter the inventively named Steve 'N' Seagulls; we've covered HD in Fireworks, so it's only fair that we treat S'N'S the same given they have clearly garnered some attention what with their videos gathering tens of millions of views on Youtube.

Like HD, this Finnish quintet employs the use of acoustic guitars, banjos and fiddles to rearrange some much loved Rock and Metal anthems in an "alternative" style, though admittedly S'N'S display considerably more skill and inventiveness in their interpretations on this debut album.

Still undecided? Then check out their versions of 'Black Dog', 'Thunderstruck', 'The Trooper', 'Ich Will', 'Paradise City', 'Nothing Else Matters', 'Over The Hills And Far Away', 'Holy Diver', 'Run To The Hills', 'You Shook Me All Night Long', 'Cemetery Gates' or the massively entertaining 'Seek And Destroy'. It's completely barmy but great fun nonetheless.

In short... like HD? Then you'll love Steve 'N' Seagulls.

Ant Heeks

STONE COLD KILLERS – 'ISOLATED HELL' *(Independent)* HARD ROCK

Phil Vokins has long been hidden in other people's bands such as Wrathchild, Persian Risk and Tyrant where he's never had a full say in musical direction, with 'Isolated Hell' you get to fully hear what he's all about. The band features former stable-mate drummer Eddie Starr, Baz Pedlingham on bass and the rather magnificent vocal talents of Stu Evans.

The title track starts with a standard, punchy riff and an introduction to Evans' gravel-infused vocal, a minute in you start to realise Vokins is one of the masters of memorable hooks. 'Hard Times' is a Heavy Rocker with a scream of a vocal and a pile-driving rhythm overlaid with slick riffs. 'Jack The Ripper' is laden with dark and brooding while 'Wash My Sins Away' has the feel of the Scorpions with "chanty" harmonies.

The "ballad" of the album, 'Standing In The Rain', is quite beautiful where Evans reins in the growl for some surprisingly emotive vocals. It swoops and soars into epic proportions and the guitar work is searing and heartbreaking in equal measure, right up to the fade-out.

'No Parole (From Rock 'N' Roll)' is a feisty Rocker; the references to Rock songs in the lyrics are a fun crowd pleaser. 'In The Groove' is Sammy Hagar era Van Halen complete with Hagar-esque vocals and some skin-beating flash from Starr on the drums. 'One Horse Town' is a fine example of what makes Vokins stand out from many guitarists; his signature quirky riffs and accents, which could be considered the guitar equivalent of one liners, can be found amongst the groove – listen for all the fills along with the slide work.

'Stone Cold Killers' is a huge, head-banging, fist puncher of a song just asking to be played to a ten thousand person crowd. Finally the closer, 'War' is the anthemic "epic" that shows that Evans is not just all about the growl. It's one I recommend you listen to through headphones as there is a lot going on during the fade that you can't hear so well via speakers.

If you are coming here for Glam and Sleaze you are not going to get it. However, if you enjoy VH, Michael Schenker or Mick Ronson and Randy Rhoads, then you will to find much to appreciate. This is a very strong first release from a band that are already lighting up the circuit and 'Isolated Hell' will surely cement that reputation.

This is not an album you'll forget any time soon; the hooks are just that, they'll be in your head for days and you will continue to find depth and interest in the layers the more you listen… and a listen is worth it, trust me.

Helen Bradley Owers

SUMO CYCO – 'LOST IN CYCO CITY' *(Radio Ghost)* MODERN/ALTERNATIVE

Toronto-based Sumo Cyco are a Female-Fronted Alternative Punk Metal outfit formed in March 2011. The band has, to date, recorded and released eleven singles (digitally) alongside Grindhouse-esque movie videos (check them out) and have also played with the likes of Coal Chamber, Filter and Life Of Agony. 'Lost In Cyco City' is the debut album by the quartet and should appeal to those with a penchant for something that veers considerably from the norm.

Lead singer Sever (real name Skye Sweetnam) was originally something of a "teen sensation" and toured as support to Britney Spears before she decided on a drastic musical career change. Hooking up with Matt "MD" Drake (guitar), Ken "Thor" Corke (bass) and Andy "Wolf" Joseph (drums) seems to have revealed a side of her that would have given the Spears entourage nightmares. The music on 'Lost In Cyco City' contains elements of Punk and Metal underpinned by some blatant Dance beats and programmed sample and loops.

Sever's style come across like a furious combination of Gwen Stefani (No Doubt), Lady Gaga and Maria Brink (In This Moment) and she has a quirky grace and sexual allure that fits the music perfectly. As a big ITM fan, I actually find a lot of the SC material appealing and the song structures certainly display a strong creative bent.

'The Ugly', 'Fighter' and 'Cry Murder' have Rock music at their core even though there is so much more going on than just hard-edged riffs and vocals. Some of the hooks ('Fuel My Fire') are anthemic and instant but most of the songs sidestep the basic verse/chorus/verse/chorus formula in favour of something more challenging. 'We Ride', for instance, is a potpourri of musical styles; there are so many ideas brought together in just four minutes that for some it could become more of a distraction than an attraction. Closing track 'My Name Is Rock 'N' Roll' is the most commercial and straight forward offering and would make a great single though it is not truly representative of the SC sound.

Being hard to pigeon hole can sometimes be detrimental to the success of an artist even though it also has its merits. Kudos to Sumo Cyco for bucking any kind of musical trend and I do hope they have success is a result. I will admit I wasn't sure at first but after several plays I'm converted..... I think.

Dave Bott

TARJA – 'LUNA PARK RIDE' *(earMUSIC)* SYMPHONIC METAL

'Luna Park Ride' is the third live album from Tarja (Turunen), but in some respects this could be considered somewhat of a re-issue. The DVD version of 'Luna...' was originally released in August 2012 as a bonus third disc with the very limited edition media-book version of Tarja's first live album 'Act 1'. The label has now decided to give it a standalone release and unleashed not only said DVD/Blu-ray but also a 2CD version as well with both items featuring seventy minutes of bonus material.

The show was filmed at Stadium Luna Park in Buenos Aires in March 2011 during the 'What Lies Beneath' world tour. The first disc of the CD version contains the fifteen track show; eleven from Tarja's solo albums with the other four made up of two Nightwish selections, a cover and a three song medley. The four inclusions from 2007's 'My Winter Storm' are 'My Little Phoenix', 'I Walk Alone', 'Ciaran's Well' and 'Die Alive'. Given it was the '...Beneath' world tour, there should be no surprise that the majority of the set-list comes from that album; these include show opener 'Dark Star', 'Falling Awake', 'In For A Kill' and 'Until My Last Breath'. The remainder consists of 'Signos' (a cover from Argentina's Soda Stereo), Nightwish's 'Stargazers' and 'Wishmaster' and a medley of 'Where Were You Last Night'/'Heaven Is A Place On Earth'/'Living On A Prayer' (the latter inclusion didn't really work for me). Tarja is on superb form, both personally and vocally, and the sound quality is excellent courtesy of Tim Palmer's (US, Robert Plant) mixing. On the downside, it is worth taking into account that eleven of the fifteen tracks found here (including the medley) can also be found on 'Act...'.

The second disc of the audio version contains fourteen live renditions taken from a variety of festival and show appearances over the last five years. The first four choices ('... Kill', '...Alone', 'The Archive Of Lost Dreams' and 'Crimson Deep') are taken from her 2010 Monsters Of Rock (Czech Republic) set and these show the Finnish songstress' music in all its grandeur with the assistance of a full orchestra (Philarmonic Bohuslava Martinu Zlin) and choir. Next up is three songs ('I Feel Immortal', 'The Siren' and '...Breath') from her 2011 show at Germany's Summer Breeze followed by a further three tracks ('500 Letters', 'Damned And Divine' and 'Neverlight') from the Tele-Club in Yekaterinburg (Russia) in 2014. This second disc is closed out by 'Anteroom Of Death' featuring Van Canto from the 2014 Wacken Open Air Festival and three songs ('Never Enough'. '...Alive' and 'Victim Of Ritual') from Summer Breeze 2014. The mixing from Palmer is once again excellent with the most interesting being the four Monsters Of Rock picks (due to the orchestra involvement) and the VC performance.

TREMONTI – 'CAUTERIZE' *(Fret12)* HEAVY METAL

Not needing too much of an introduction, Mark Tremonti from Creed and Alter Bridge is a superstar guitarist who also has his own band – Tremonti – which has just released their second album to much anticipation. Being a three-piece outfit with the man himself on vocals (and guitars obviously), the music is tight and intense and very Metal-oriented.

Due to Mark Tremonti's pedigree of being a guitarist's guitarist yet also selling a lot of records, the songs hit the balance of being powerful and credible but also easy on the ear. The angst ridden and strong vocals from Mark Tremonti backed by the formidable bassist and drumming pairing of Eric Friedman and Garrett Whitlock actually end up with a commercial sounding product. Putting the band's undisputed musicianship aside, they have come up with catchy songs to boot; the chorus to opener 'Radical Change' stays with you for a long time.

Interspersing the full-on core sound of the band, there are some quieter musical passages such as the closing sections to 'Cauterize' and the verses to the Doom laden 'Dark Trip' (however, it must be said the verse of the song has some of the most crashing power chords you could ever hear). On the matter of guitars, it is of little surprise there are a multitude of exceptional guitar solos on display, probably the most off the wall being on 'Another Heart'.

Mark Tremonti's vocals excel on this album, most notably on the mid-paced 'Fall Again'. So when you include his guitar prowess and the overall sharpness of the band in to the equation, there are a plethora of positives to this album – well worth a purchase.

Rob McKenzie

The DVD/Blu-Ray version provides a greater insight into the show than the audio disc. Here you can actually see Tarja's vivid enthusiasm and heartfelt interactions with the audience as well as seeing and hearing their lively response which includes plenty of hands in the air and bouncing around. Given it is fan-filmed, there isn't the usual professional camera work or Hi Def footage normally associated with a release of this nature but what you do get is many unusual types of shots and different angles that gives more of a feeling of being there. Thankfully the editing avoids the recent pitfall of being too schizophrenic and quick fire and includes many split-screen, multi-angle moments, black and white shots and even some slow motion action. With the sound quality remaining high, it is a great way to experience the show. The full DVD/Blu-Ray copy also comes with footage of all fourteen bonus tracks but my promo copy was just the Luna Park concert itself so I can't comment on those.

For Tarja enthusiasts and completists, this is another must have item that will be worth adding to your collections. This should also interest more general Symphonic Metal fans unless of course you already own 'Act…' in which case there is a question mark about song duplication; having not seen it, I regretfully can't give you a comparison. But what I can say is that even for those with only a passing interest in Tarja, this is a fine release in its own right (regardless of your preferred format) and one that it bolstered and improved by a decent amount of interesting extras.

'Luna Park Ride' is another first class effort from one of Female-Fronted Metal's biggest names.

Dave Scott

TEMPERANCE – 'LIMITLESS' *(Scarlet)* MODERN/ALTERNATIVE

Temperance are an Italian Female-Fronted Modern Metal band who I first came across last year when I reviewed their self-titled debut in issue #63. It was a "stunning" release that knocked my proverbial socks off and immediately elevated them as the fifth entry into my "special group" of Female-Fronted acts that are lesser known but every bit as good as the major players.

In terms of sound and style, Temperance aren't the simplest to define given they incorporate a lot of varied ingredients into their music. They're clearly Modern Melodic Metal at their core but there are also little dashes of Symphonic and Power Metal in there as well.

Any listener can expect to find an array of massive riffs, plenty of fast paced rhythms (with the expected double drum detonations), an assortment of unforgettable choruses and the glorious vocals of Chiara working in tandem with Marco's yells and growls. I previously mentioned that they were not dissimilar to a mixture of Amaranthe and Epica and I think that still holds true.

Having been blown away by their debut, it gives me immense pleasure to say that 'Limitless' is even better than its predecessor. Everything that hit the mark the first time can be found in abundance on this release, but this time around the choruses are even better and more infectious than the Centre For Disease Control.

Any one of the thirteen tracks could be highlighted as each of them has something to offer, but there were a handful that managed to raise themselves slightly higher. These include the superb scatter gun-like riffing and memorable Operatic choral vocals of opener 'Oblivion', the beautiful chorus of the power ballad 'Stay', which runs up the gears as it progresses, as well as the thumping axe work and catchy, quick fire chorus of the Symphonic leaning 'Side By Side'.

My personal favourites include the rollickingly good 'Mr White' with its stomping progression and lively duelling vocals, the frantic 'Me, Myself And I' where hammering riffs combine with a bouncing lyrical delivery and the album closer 'Limitless', which is an absolute monster featuring everything that is great about Temperance in one hard hitting entry. All three of these feature choruses that will imbed themselves in your mind so deep you will need hypnotherapy to remove them. Lastly there's the sensational ballad 'Goodbye' which is another that picks up in pace as it goes along and also includes some soaring soloing, passionate vocals and goose bump-inducing lyrics.

Temperance's sophomore release is even more awesome than their debut and something that should be on the radar of all Modern Female-Fronted Metal fans. This will certainly be vying for a spot in my Top Five come year end.

Dave Scott

THE DEAD DAISIES – 'REVOLUCIÓN' *(Spitfire)* HARD ROCK

Formed in 2012 by David Lowy and ex-INXS/Noiseworks vocalist Jon Stevens, The Dead Daisies released a great self-titled debut album which Slash guested on, before enjoying high profile tours with Aerosmith, ZZ Top and KISS. Classed as a "rotating musical collective", members include bassist Marco Mendoza, Dizzy Reed and Richard Fortus from Guns 'N' Roses on keyboards and guitar and drummer Brian Tichy.

After the superb 'Face I Love' EP, I was counting the seconds for the new DD album. Unfortunately, while Reed, Mendoza, Fortus and Lowy remain, Tichy is gone, replaced by Jackie Barnes, son of Aussie legend Jimmy. More critically though, is the departure of Stevens, replaced by ex-Mötley Crüe singer John Corabi. I doubt as a founder member Stevens intended to be one of the rotating musicians. He recently had a bad time in the press due to allegations of domestic abuse by his ex-girlfriend which saw him have gigs cancelled by promoters (despite the fact the charges were subsequently dropped) and I'm wondering if it also cost him his job here, with more high profile gigs supporting KISS imminent.

Stevens was the reason I checked out this band and while I have no problem with Corabi as an artist, much like his time in the Crüe, he sounds absolutely nothing like his predecessor. Opener 'Mexico' is a killer track and I like it a great deal, but I cannot get past the fact Stevens name is on the writing credits (one of four tracks he contributed to) and in my head, I keep hearing his higher, cleaner voice being better suited than Corabi's distinctive, gruff vocal.

'Looking For The One' is a prime example of a track which I think a cleaner voice would have given a more melodic feel than Corabi's throaty approach. Willie Dixon's 'Evil' does benefit from Corabi's gruffness, but he comes unstuck on 'Empty Heart', a track co-written and duetted with Jimmy Barnes who sounds much more at ease to the song; I accepted his voice instantly, unlike Corabi.

There's lots of high points – the blazing cover of the Sensational Alex Harvey Band's 'Midnight Moses' and the driving 'Devil Out Of Time' both stand out, and the more I've listened to it, the more I realize, like his tenure in MC, this Corabi-led record is actually very strong. What's stopping me from fully enjoying it is the stark difference in vocal styles.

For me, it's telling that my favourite four tracks were the four Stevens had co-written before he departed. I personally don't believe Corabi is a better fit for the band, or a better singer than Stevens was. That is the one thing which prevents me fully embracing this new line-up and is the sole sticking point on an otherwise very solid effort.

James Gaden

THOBBE ENGLUND – 'FROM THE WILDERNESS' *(Lion)* INSTRUMENTAL

Thorbjorn "Thobbe" Englund is (perhaps) best known from his current tenure in Sabaton, but there's certainly more to this blonde-haired Viking axeman than just shredding on the group's 2014 album 'Heroes'. He already has a multitude of previous records – with Winterlong and Star Queen – under his belt and now he has returned to solo territory as he releases his second album 'From The Wilderness'.

The first track, 'Wildborn', wouldn't have sounded too odd if it had been included on the following Sabaton album instead – it's a massive guitar gallop bristling with shred tricks. This is followed by 'Stormy Nights' which has a Neo-Classical vibe to it and 'A Lonely Hunter' where majestic, ballad-esque instrumental parts blend with a more straightforward Hard Rock guitar sound. The short "robotic" intro to 'Life From Death' brings to mind the 8-bit sound of the early video games only to develop into a vivid instrumental with many interesting interludes.

'Justice Of Nature' is pure shredding – intense, fast and wild – and it precedes the muscular riffs juxtaposing with a heavy, thumping bass line found within 'Hunting Under A Blood Red Moon'. 'Surviving' and 'Eternal Struggle' are slow and grandiose, different in their consistency from 'Vargens Öde' and its picturesque, epic coda with an almost cinematographic feel that is heavily contrasted with the song's delicate intro. A bonus track 'Fingerspitzengefühl' – or "the track with the title I won't dare pronounce" – is lyrical and performed by Englund himself. Although he might not have had the most impressive singing technique and range in the world, he surely knows a thing or two about vocal expressiveness – Udo Dirkschneider style.

Englund also knows a thing or two about writing bombastic, albeit wonderfully clichéd Heavy Metal anthems with catchy choruses and references to all-time Rock classics. But haven't we heard it before…? The truth is that Sabaton's "Metal Crüe" was conceived years before Englund joined the band but it seems the guitarist has still learned a thing or two being in Joakim Brodén's camp.

Pointless musings aside, Thobbe Englund's sophomore solo effort 'From The Wilderness' is not only a must for the legions of Sabaton fans but also a tasty treat for shred aficionados. It's simply a well-conceived and perfectly-crafted instrumental album, with plenty of focus on technique but also containing a lot of space, sound diversity and finesse. This is certainly one of the best guitar-oriented albums of 2015 so far and thus highly recommended.

Alexandra Mrozowska

THOUGHTS OF MIND – 'THE DICHOTOMY PARADOX' *(Independent)* PROGRESSIVE

At the age of just fifteen, Andrew Serr, who is now a musician, producer, engineer, artist and teacher, wanted to see if it was possible to create a musical project that was played and envisioned by just one individual.

In 2013, he set about making this boyhood dream come true and just over a year later 'The Dichotomy Paradox' was finished. As originally envisaged, the album sees Serr writing, singing and playing all the instruments whilst also handling production duties. And what he has come up with is quite extraordinary.

'…Paradox' is not just a work of love, but an album that Dream Theater, Riverside, Pain Of Salvation and Subsignal fans have to own. Yes, I know I've said it before, but this album is really that good and to say it's down to just one man is astonishing.

Serr himself proves to be the consummate professional by never going over the top with the production or his playing, instead always trying to show the music in its best light. His subtle guitar and bass work blends delightfully with his clever keyboard runs and his sympathetic, thoughtful and deep lyrics are delivered by his plaintive emotional vocals with a direct, no nonsense approach which no doubt brings out everything he wanted to from his music. Of the songs that make up '…Paradox' there's two epic tracks worth highlighting that begin and end the album.

'Dreams In The Dark' sweeps past in what seems like mere moments but during its fourteen plus minute run time, Serr visits many places that seem filled with darkness and urgent longing and his accomplished musicianship pulls everything that is great about Progressive Metal to the fore. The guitars are menacing but have a wonderful melodic quality that runs just under the surface, his arrangements are breathtaking with seamless time changes and the strong production values keep your attention focused solely on his music.

The album's title track is almost eighteen minutes of Progressive genius wrapped up with a bow. The drums, bass, keyboards, guitars and vocals work together so cleverly that before you know it, the song is over and you reaching for the replay button. It's a complex, though provoking song with intricate musicianship and intelligent multi-layered lyrics that always keeps you wanting more. It is also a song that many a Prog Metal giant would kill to have written.

For true Prog fans my only advice is just "buy". For everyone else, '…Paradox' has enough melody, musicianship and great songs to keep you very happy as well. This is a brilliant piece of work and Serr really does deserve your consideration (available through nimbitmusic.com).

Ian Johnson

THUNDER AND BLITZKRIEG – 'BROKE, WILD & FREE' *(Billy Brawler/HighScore)* HARD ROCK

Considering the name, it didn't surprise me much to find out that Thunder And Blitzkrieg are from Germany. I was also expecting a typically bombastic assault on my ears, another band putting the jackboot in with verve and vigour. It's not that I don't like German bands, but have heard way too much subpar Metal to get too excited much of the time.

As has been the case for so many other albums this month, I've been happily surprised by TAB who bounce through the speakers in a manner not dissimilar to Airbourne with the opening title track. The single 'Torpedo Lover' follows the pattern nicely, delivering a sort of cheesy Heavy Rock 'n' Roll/Blues sandwich that is hard not to simply enjoy for the fun of it.

From there on it continues in much the same vein, enjoyable enough and well played but nothing overly memorable except the standout track 'I Will Let You Down', which has whatever the magic ingredient is that makes a song just better than all the others. There's certainly nothing that could be classed as poor quality in evidence across the whole album and whilst it is not as good as Airbourne, the band aren't that far off.

From the Spanish language 'Arde' (fast, frenetic and fun) to 'Die For Rock 'N' Roll' (catchy

and cheesy), Thunder And Blitzkrieg do a fine job of entertaining the listener without doing anything at all surprising. As students of the "if it ain't broke, don't fix it" school of Rock 'n' Roll, they get a passing grade from this me and this magazine.

Alan Holloway

TIMOTHY CRAIG – '360°' *(Ball & Chain)* SOUTHERN/COUNTRY/FOLK

Timothy Craig's seventh studio album '360°' is – unfortunately I have to confess – the first of his records to come to my attention. The Country Rock musician from Ft. Myers, Florida has shown his extra commitment to music by being a Sterling member of the CMA, the Recording Academy and by contributing to a large number of events with his work. To me, it's not quite a miracle that Craig is in such high demand all over the place since his way to write and play music is redolent of a mixture of Jimmy Barnes, Bob Seger, Bruce Springsteen and Tom Petty.

'360°' comes along as a very well-balanced record and is certainly showing off the influences of the aforementioned great role models. Aiming and firing straight at the hearts of Country Rock lovers, he opens the record with upbeat 'Flesh 'N' Blood', where a dominating violin meets crisp sounding Rock guitar. 'Crime Of The Century' deals with the topic of a broken relationship and is a song that you'd expect to hear at a typical Country bar in Tennessee, where Stetson-wearing fellows jiggle their feet to the beat (sorry for using stereotype pictures here).

The beautiful mandolin that has been added to 'Don't Walk Away' gives the song a great feeling whilst the catchy call-and-respond chorus settles in your head immediately. The impulsive 'The Closer I Get' (great lyrics!), banjo-infused 'Smell The Roses', the rich in Rock and Country contrasts 'Learning To Live Without You', the summer-like, Country-punched 'State Line' and deep but lively 'Can't You Feel My Heart' are all equally strong tracks. There are no real surprises but nevertheless they all feature refreshing diversity in instrumentation and topics.

'One Small Miracle' is certainly, and surprisingly, the absolute highlight; I have to say surprisingly since I wouldn't normally refer to a ballad as the strongest song but this one is outstanding. A beautiful violin, accompanied by an acoustic guitar and highly emotive lyrics resound from the speakers while Craig's rough, throaty and passionate voice is reaching out to you; literally..."someone send me an angel..."

The record closes, after about thirty-five minutes of play time, with the Springsteen-like 'Stand Still' and this is just another genre-comprehensive, very heartfelt track with catchy lyrics and guitars.

'360°' is a very fine record with a rather wide appeal. Craig and his band of very skilful, devotedly and passionate musicians make the listener just float away on the topics and feelings of "broken-promise-land" thoughts, happiness yet sanguinity alongside contrasting doubt and wonder.

The album as whole is a great product, even though the efforts of being "a bit too commercial" at times is something Craig surely doesn't need to include in his song-writing.

Julia Braun

TOM COCHRANE – 'TAKE IT HOME' *(Universal)* SOUTHERN/COUNTRY/FOLK

I'll wager that a high proportion of Fireworks readers know of Canadian Tom Cochrane and quite probably own at least one album on which he appears. Back in the halcyon days of AOR, he joined Red Rider with whom he recorded six studio (and one live) albums; so pivotal was his role as both singer and primary song-writer that the band changed their name to Tom Cochrane & Red Rider during the latter part of their time together.

He launched his solo career in 1991 with the release of a single 'Life Is A Highway' which became a global hit; subsequently a cover of the song by Rascal Flatts appeared in the Pixar movie 'Cars'. For AOR fans, his 'Ragged Ass Road' album from 1995 is the most likely item to feature in their collection with its Bob Seger/John Mellencamp vibe and storytelling style gaining him many fans at that time.

I'd lost touch with his career until those helpful people at Amazon alerted me to this new album, it being his first since 2006 and only the fourth since '...Road'. I can't vouch for the intervening three albums but with this release Cochrane has moved in a more Country styled direction.

I'm not entirely averse to Country provided it's not the really overt kind and opening track 'Can't Stay Here' is the sort that's alright with me, however the following 'Sunday Afternoon Hang' is the complete opposite. The gang style vocals sound messy, like a bunch of drunks have broken into the studio and hit the record button. By comparison 'Diamonds' is delightful with lovely melodies, a great chorus and a charming vocal arrangement that features Tareya Green as an answering voice. 'Country Girls Never Get Old' is far better than the title suggests, as it paints a picture akin to Bon Jovi's Tommy & Gina.

Just when I thought things were taking a turn for the better along comes 'When The Light Starts To Fade' which is all steel guitar and whining vocals. 'Pink Time' is another terrible title but as ballads go it's pretty decent with Beverley Knight's contribution being spectacular. 'First Time Around' is shouty and lacking in a decent hook.

The more I hear 'Another Year' the more it feels like Casey McPherson of Flying Colors/Alpha Rev while the following 'A Prayer For Hope' has a similar flavour, although the banjo towards the end is a real turn-off, which regrettably is a recurring theme across this album.

The album definitely has its moments but if, like me, you remember Tom Cochrane for his AOR material, you'll probably want to give this a wide berth.

Gary Marshall

TOOMAS VANEM – 'I' *(Independent)* INSTRUMENTAL

The electric guitar has enjoyed such exponential growth and wide appeal since its inception, that it is often overlooked just how brief its history actually is. Its universal appeal and presence in both popular and Jazz idioms, along with its "coolness" factor, have all been qualities that have catapulted its popularity and influenced multitudes to pursue it as a hobby or better yet, study it for a career.

Musicians of any discipline are influenced by those who preceded them, with each subsequent generation taking that inspiration to expand and unlock possibilities never previously invented or attained. Although virtuosity on any instrument is nothing new, players of the electric guitar are some of most lauded and usually experience some of the best exposure.

Toomas Vanem is one such guitarist who is able to raise that bar of excellence and demonstrates those impressive skills on 'I.' His talent is humbling and his name is worthy of inclusion on all and any "Best Guitarist" lists. He blazes throughout with songs that showcase a plethora of genres including Rock, Jazz, Latin and Middle Eastern. Pulling from both Rock and Jazz harmonic vocabularies, this is a modern day Fusion album at its finest.

He is able to balance harmonic and structural complexities without the songs dissolving into exercises in technique. They are challenging for the consummate musician, yet accessible enough for the casual listener. Despite a distinctive "Jazzy" flair, he never loses connection with his Hard Rock roots. He also shreds with reckless abandon, yet conveys his musical thoughts with a seamless and flowing melodicism.

For those who are fans of Allan Holdsworth, Bill Connors, Shawn Lane, Mike Stern or Frank Gambale, then I would suggest 'I' is essential listening. Even if you are unaware of those players but are a musician yourself, a person who enjoys instrumental music and/or wants to expand their horizons, this is about as good as it gets.

However, fair warning needs to be given to all aspiring musicians; one listen to this will be a humbling experience because Vanem (and the rest of the band) is/are frighteningly accomplished at his/their respective craft.

Toomas Vanem is deserving of all accolades from the Rock and Jazz communities and I am thankful to have been exposed to his incredible talents both as a guitarist and composer. This guy has my attention and may certainly grab yours as well!

Brent Rusche

TORRENTIAL THRILL – 'MARS' *(Independent)* HARD ROCK

While Googling to find out more about Torrential Thrill, it was rather disappointing to find that there are more links to illegal downloads of this album than there are to information about the band, but I guess (sadly) that's just a sign of the world we now live in. So do yourself and the band a favour, dear reader, and invest your cash the honest way in a copy of this excellent album, you won't be disappointed.

A four-piece from the wonderful city of Melbourne, Australia, Torrential Thrill's debut is lyrically, in their own words, "a one-fingered salute to the greed and narcissism surrounding Western society in the 21st Century". As the lyrics steer clear of archetypal subject matter in favour of their chosen focus of attention, then so does the music. It successfully steers clear of formulaic arrangements throughout a diverse collection of styles, from the interesting spoken word intro 'The Firm' that leads into the hard-hitting, riff-driven yet ultimately catchy-as-hell 'Mars' to the wickedly pulsating 'Menace In The Minor' closer.

Though decidedly heavy in a rough 'n' ready, grittily Modern Hard Rock/Metal style, the groove-orientated rhythms and the subtle melodies that permeate throughout, as demonstrated on 'Lucky Strike' and 'Take Over Me', make the album easily accessible. The stunning guitar work of Steven Morrell on some lengthy solo spots adds an extra enjoyable element.

The album takes a more Melodic turn midway as first single 'King Of The Road' appears, an exhilaratingly up-tempo AC/DC-style Rocker constructed around a simplistic yet catchy riff. It's followed by 'Close Your Eyes', a tender, ballad-based number with a non-conventional arrangement that sees vocalist Chris Malcher singing in a softer style than the regular gruffer approach he uses on the rest of the material. Last of the melodic tracks is the Pop Punk style of 'Lightning'.

The heavier 'Inner Demons' heads firmly into 'Black Album' era Metallica territory, as there is a definite 'Enter Sandman' feel about this particular song, while 'Need It To Fight'

TRIXTER – 'HUMAN ERA' *(Frontiers)* MELODIC ROCK

I've always had a soft spot for Trixter so I was a very happy man when they released 'New Audio Machine' after reforming back in 2012, even more so given it was a fantastic album. Some bands and musicians from the past who have returned to the Melodic Rock scene in recent years have supplied just as much disappointment as joyous returns to action. Thankfully Trixter are in the latter category and are back bigger, badder and more "kick ass" than ever.

So I was beyond excitable to hear 'Human Era' and it's it pleasure to say I wasn't disappointed and my high expectations were met. The term "all killer, no filler" is extremely overused these days, but in the case of 'Human...', it's a fitting term for this solid slab of Melodic Rock goodness that is full of infectious anthems with killer choruses and energetic rhythms.

The overall feel of this album is just fun time, uplifting Party Rock and the amount of sing-along choruses and infectious guitar licks that it contains is simply not funny. Trixter's latest should come with a health warning because sore throats and twisted fingers from excessive air guitar widdling will be endemic following release day.

One thing that I think helps Trixter stand out is they are not afraid to tweak and modernize their sound, therefore keeping themselves and their music vital and exciting; many other bands trying to recreate the past come across as sterile and bland. These modernizations aren't anything to be scared of and are, in most cases, quite subtle and they are simply embracing some Pop Rock elements prominent in American music. Traditionalists may be spitting out their dummies in shock at this moment but don't panic, 'Human...' is one hundred percent Trixter and will definitely have established fans jumping for joy like kids at Christmas.

All these songs have a fantastic energy and are definitely written with an ear towards them causing a big impact live. I'm salivating over the prospect of hearing the likes of 'Midnight In Your Eyes', 'All Night Long', 'Every Second Counts' and the emotive power ballad 'Beats Me Up' in the live setting.

'Human Era' is the embodiment of the term Party Rock and this album would provide a great, uplifting Rock and Roll ambience to any self-respecting Melodic Rockers shindig! To me, this is surely going to be one of the biggest hits in the Melodic Rock world this year and should be a top priority purchase; just remember the crate of beer and strippers to accompany it!

Melodic Hard Rock perfection, grab your air guitar and throw the horns up!

Paul Woodward

is a darker and moody piece and probably my least favourite track here. But the lively 'Why Diane?' lifts the mood again with more of the Punky attitude and a tongue-in-cheek lyric.

The diverse collection of musical styles, interesting lyrics and a spiky attitude make 'Mars' an album that's well worth investigating.

Ant Heeks

TYSONDOG – 'CRY HAVOC' *(Rocksector)* HEAVY METAL

You can't teach an old dog new tricks so they say. Twenty-six years after Tysondog's last full album of original material, they reappeared in 2012 for the 'Hammerhead' EP; a re-working of four old favourites. But now we have 'Cry Havoc', a full-scale Metal album and their first since signing to the ever growing Rocksector Records.

Back in the 1980s, Tysondog's albums were held in high regards with much critical acclaim after appearing in the latter part of the NWOBHM movement. In truth there probably isn't much in the way of new tricks in '...Havoc', but what we have got is a damn fine album that deserves the same respect and acclaim as any of its predecessors.

'Cry Havoc' itself kicks off the album in fast and furious style, an aggressive, abrasive romp that sets the tone for the whole album, with some great duelling guitar work and gritty vocals. 'The Needle' is built upon a slower brooding riff, but with no less power and passion for the change of pace. The vocals of John "Clutch" Carruthers are, for me, a strength throughout, maybe not displaying the full range of old, but still combining plenty of raw power and melody as required. 'Nemesis' starts quietly before building into one of the most memorable riffs on offer and more fluid guitar work.

Style wise, Tysondog fall nicely between classic sounding NWOBHM and Power Metal; Judas Priest and Accept being the most obvious reference points. Not surprising perhaps as guitarist Paul Burdis and Stevie Morrison also play together in a Priest tribute band. But most importantly, they stay well on the right side of "influenced by" and have continued where they left off with their own sound. That said 'Shadow Of The Beast' and 'Playing With Fire' are two full-throttle riffs that wouldn't sound out of place in 'Painkiller' era Priest.

Kevin Wynn's bass lines are always just prominent enough in the mix to fill out the sound, but despite the Metal-based strengths of the album, the highlight is surely 'Broken', the one ballad on the album. Echo-filled rhythm, picked out over anguished vocals tells a haunting tale of the struggle to cope with lost love, completed (again) with some excellent guitar work as the emotion builds. Although it probably is unfair to keep making the comparisons, 'Broken' is Tysondog's equivalent of Priest's 'Beyond The Realms Of Death' – it is that good.

In 'Cry Havoc' Tysondog have recreated their NWOBHM persona and taken it up a notch. You may not be able to teach an old dog new tricks, but you don't need too when the old dogs just do them better.

Ian Parry

UNLEASH THE ARCHERS – 'TIME STANDS STILL' *(Napalm)* HEAVY METAL

At first, I was slightly unsure of whether the latest Unleash The Archers album – 'Time Stands Still' – should be included. The reason for my consternation was that not only does it include some growls/scowls but it can also go seriously "hell for leather" at certain points. But given the questionable elements were very sporadic and the remainder was both excellent and very much what we do cover, it seemed a crime to omit it.

For those unaware like me, UTA are a Female-Fronted five-piece band from Vancouver who formed in 2007 and have so far released two albums. Their sound is predominantly built upon a traditional Heavy Metal foundation with a slight Power Metal-tinge and some growling thrown in; although the latter element doesn't feature as much as heard with the likes of Scar Symmetry or Epica. When contemplating a comparison, think a Female-Fronted Iron Maiden, or more precisely Kobra And The Lotus with a little more bollocks (or on steroids) and occasionally featuring someone like Mark Jansen (Epica).

The album erupts in fine style with the first main track 'Frozen Steel', it fuels the KATL comparison with its galloping guitar, lively yet easily memorable chorus and vocalist Brittney Slayes sounding very reminiscent of her Canadian compatriot Kobra Paige, even down to the wails. One of the most rampant songs (one of those that raised the question mark) is 'Hail Of The Tide' which, similarly to SS's effort last year, has momentary eruptions of seriously Thrashy guitar with deep growls/scowling. But these are just short bursts whilst the rest of the song is an enjoyable Classic Metal romp with another catchy chorus.

'Tonight We Ride' features more scorching axe work, stratosphere-surfing vocals that are contrasted by deep, occasional growls and a chorus that implants itself pretty quickly. 'Dreamcrusher' is an impressive, nine minute, varied epic that incorporates restrained passages with explosions of pace-filled, retro Metal and a chorus that mixes Slayes' sailing vocals with growls into a truly catchy choral line.

Two tracks quickly became my favourites on 'Time...'; Firstly, 'Test Your Metal' is a 1980's sounding number that reminded me of Vixen with a driven Hard Rocking riff and infectious chorus that even includes chanting backing vocals. The other, 'Going Down Fighting', is a Classic Metal offering with a retro twin guitar attack that chugs and skips its way onto a super catchy "woohoo" filled chorus.

'Time Stands Still' immediately hit the mark with me due to its blazing guitars and powerful vocals. It's an album that has further grown on me with each listen and one that should resonate well with many other Female-Fronted fans (who also don't mind some growling). Anyone into potent, fiery Heavy Metal should prepare to Unleash The Archers.

Dave Scott

VAMPS – 'BLOODSUCKERS' *(Spinefarm)* MODERN/ALTERNATIVE

If you're Japanese, I'm sure you are aware of Vamps, who have returned with a fourth album of music that the casual listener would never associate with the Orient. The Gothy cover doesn't throw any hints, in fact it gives the impression of something much less mainstream than what actually awaits inside.

Vamps, you see, are a pretty standard but talented Rock/Metal group that will certainly appeal to teenagers and their ilk, with angsty, angry, synth-fuelled Rock that is punctuated with energetic choruses and a general aversion to songs titles with more than one word.

Unusually, I actually like the ninety second intro 'Reincarnation', mainly because it's a sweet piano piece rather than an extension to the opening track as is often found on so many releases. From there onwards, the album gets going with a light, melodic piece called 'Zero', which highlights their Pop sensibilities, followed by 'Lips' to show that they can do proper Heavy Alt Rock as well. When they do Rock it up there's a fair pinch of bands like My Chemical Romance involved, with "in your face" melody and some excellent vocals that are sometimes screamed yet still with control and careful pitch. To be honest, it all sounds very American, but for all I know that's what they like in Japan, and as long as it sounds good, that's the important thing.

Vamps have a sound aimed at the younger audience, but it's something they do very, very well at times. You can imagine the Punky, melodic 'Ahead' being a big hit in the Rock charts and it's this capacity for melody as well as power that allows Vamps to appeal to all sorts of audiences. Personally, I like it and can appreciate what they do, but I may be a little old fashioned to really be a fan.

Alan Holloway

VARIOUS ARTISTS – 'A LIGHT IN THE BLACK: A TRIBUTE TO RONNIE JAMES DIO' *(Massacre)* HARD ROCK

Tributes to Ronnie James Dio are becoming quite a popular thing to do. Jorn Lande did one which was very listenable, then there was the all star 'This Is Your Life' effort, which saw Tenacious D ludicrously win a Grammy for their version of 'The Last In Line'. Now Massacre Records have decided to release a two disc set with a variety of their artists covering twenty songs worth of material from RJD's long, storied career.

I have to admit while I'm very well versed in RJD's output, I'm not massively familiar with that many of the acts featured here. The song selection is excellent, proving once and for all what a magnificent contribution this legendary man made to Rock and Metal. One of the bands I do know, Crystal Ball, kick things off and they do a good job of 'Sacred Heart' and give a pretty faithful rendition. Similar plaudits could go to MessengeR for their efforts at 'Kill The King' and 'Don't Talk To Strangers', although the vocals lack the considerable power of the late, great man himself.

Most of the big songs are here, with Love Might Kill taking on 'Stand Up And Shout', but there are also a few slightly lesser known selections to pique interest. Gloryful have a go at 'Metal Will Never Die', the last ever track RJD recorded, before balancing things out with the obvious choice of 'Holy Diver', while Wizard announced "every Dio song is a true masterpiece" and chose 'Caught In The Act'. I hadn't a clue what song that was, until I played it and discovered it was 'Caught In The Middle', a track from Dio's beloved classic debut album 'Holy Diver'. Rookie error, that – come on lads!

Iron Fate must be commended for their bravery by doing a rather impressive version of Rainbow's monster 'A Light In The Black'. But their hard work is undone by the truly brutal rendition of 'Neon Knights' by Burden Of Grief who elect to growl the vocals and it's a pretty bad decision as far as I am concerned; I doubt the great man would be particularly impressed either.

Granted, there are more hits than misses, most of it is perfectly listenable and with material spanning Rainbow, Black Sabbath and Dio, there's not much here not to like. The main problem is there isn't one singer on this compilation that comes anywhere near the legendary vocalist, proving how good RJD was. Nobody has dared try 'Stargazer' and even 'Long Live Rock And Roll' has been ignored.

What you are left with are some very good covers, some decent covers, and the aforementioned blunderous growling effort, which borders on sacrilege. It's a nice idea and plenty of effort has been put into the tribute, but now I've heard it, I would then be hard pushed to think of a reason to ever play it over the originals again.

James Gaden

VARIOUS ARTISTS – 'THUNDER AND STEEL DOWN UNDER – A TRIBUTE TO RIOT' *(Skol)* HARD ROCK

Oh, not another tribute album I hear you cry... and I'm not surprised. However, in the shape of 'Thunder And Steel Down Under – A Tribute To Riot', we have one of those rare things in a tribute record that actually does the band in question proud. In this case, a whole host of lesser known acts from across Europe and the U.S. have come together to offer up a song each from the rich and varied Riot catalogue. They don't all come off a hundred percent but considering the standard often served up on these types of albums, the strike rate is really pretty high.

Ferdy Doernberg (Rough Silk, Axel Rudi Pell) opens proceedings with a passionate rendition of 'Soldier' before ARP himself takes up the gauntlet for a punchy blast through 'Warrior'. U.S.A. outfit Attacker turn 'Fire Down Under' into a NWOBHM romp which piqued my interest in a band I'd previously never encountered. From there, the highlights come thick and fast; 'Outlaw' is a fiery Melodic Rock anthem courtesy of Walpyrgus, 'Flight Of The Warrior' a hammer blow of Speed and Power Metal from (current flavours of the month) Alpha Tiger, Rocka Rollas from Sweden hit maximum velocity with a vicious romp through 'Riot' while 'Alter Of The King' is turned into a Scorpions like surge by Evil United.

Even those tracks which don't quite fully convince have merit. October 31 hit like a slightly unsteady Di'Anno era Iron Maiden with their version of 'Loanshark' whereas Dexter Ward struggles with a few of the high notes on the otherwise passable 'Running From The Law'. Things are rounded out by Savage Master ('Swords And Tequila'), Angelo Perlepes' Mystery ('Sign Of The Crimson Storm'), Stallion ('Rock City') and Night Demon ('Road Racin"), all four faring well as they stay true to the originals while adding their own stamp.

However stealing the show is current Riot V vocalist Todd Michael Hall, who guests with Crystal Viper on 'Thundersteel', a song he is fast making his own (check out the killer live version on the recent Riot V album 'Unleash The Fire'). Here however he duets with CV singer Marta Gabriel, the pair making a mightily impressive team on a take which rivals the original.

Not only is 'Thunder And Steel Down Under – A Tribute To Riot' limited to a thousand physical copies but all proceeds raised from this release go to Tony Reale, the father of the late great Riot guitarist Mark Reale. Grab a copy before they're all gone, donate to a good cause and, as the acts involved have here, pay tribute to a great band and their music, as you do so.

Steven Reid

VIRGIN STEELE – 'NOCTURNES OF HELLFIRE & DAMNATION' *(SteamhammerSPV)* HEAVY METAL

There has always been more than Metal about Virgin Steele. Originally Jack Starr's project really, they produced some fine Hard Rock and Metal until Starr eventually left and front-man David DeFeis took control. At this point, their dramatic and theatrical flair came to light on albums like 'The Marriage Of Heaven And Hell (Parts 1 & 2)' and this allowed their Barbaric Romantic music a way out, even on a Rock Opera.

Their last, 'The Black Light Bacchanalia' was pretty special and now DeFeis presents a new collection of connected music, the thread and common factor is the links between

humans, entities and deities. Some of it is quite dark, some of it is quite worrying but all of it is interesting.

'To Darkness Eternal' sets the stall out on a piano backing and some whispered Occult nonsense, 'Persephone' has a journey down Shaftesbury Avenue to the West End, heavy groove to dramatic vocals and a different time structure in a middle that creeps up to Prog Metal and frightens a soft hearted piano. 'Demolition Queen' even has a waltz around the chunky acoustic and gorgeous Bluesy solo.

They don't just do this of course, they tiptoe through the rolling mist as a widdling solo rises up from a grave, whispers buzz in your ear, they also kick up a damn good groove on 'Delirium', cheerfully recounting "passing the days, pissing on graves". DeFeis has a strong yelping, coughing, snuffling delivery which adds such character and Edward Pursino's solos open a bag of pleasing tricks.

Fourteen tracks of enjoyable, florid, Theatrical Metal, unpolished by design and always interesting. You might find this a 'Chicago' bothering 'West Side Story' pastiche with 'Les Miserables' mawkish malarkey. But really, it's something a bit special, light to bathe in, darkness to hide under with music as your weird companion.

Steve Swift

WESTLAKE – 'WESTLAKE' *(Rapid Fire)* HEAVY METAL

One of the ongoing tendencies among the fan base of the particular band is the assumption the solo output of any band member will function, more or less, as a continuation of the group's style, or perhaps at least as an extension to it. More often than not however, going solo happens so a musician can explore some different paths of his musical development – and also perhaps un-shelving ideas he was never able to put into practice with his original band. That's exactly what Hydrogyn producer and guitar player Jeff Westlake has done on his debut self-titled release that's just seen the light of day. The varied album shows many different sides to his work and proves beyond any doubt that Hydrogyn is only one of many paths Westlake trod.

Muscular, meaty riffs and aggressive vocals is what drives the album's first track 'Disappear'. This kind of sound aesthetics brings to mind the late 1990s and early 2000s and whatever was happening within the sphere of Metal music at the turn of the decade – Industrial Metal, Nu-Metal and all sorts of things. Next is 'Take Me Higher', an atmospheric piece with ominous vocals that is perhaps a tad closer to Westlake's work in Hydrogyn than the previous one. 'Reality' is mid-tempo Modern Metal with vociferous choruses which is followed by the groovy, guitar-laden 'Giv'n Ur Luv Away'.

What else do we have here? A marching instrumental interlude – 'New World Soldier', a heavy, muscular track with Southern Metal and Modern Blues influences – 'Sea Of Lies' – and a dramatized mid-tempo embroidered with particularly distinctive drum thwacks entitled 'Slip Away'. 'Blame Me' is mellow verses juxtaposed with expressive choruses, preceding a slow, sultry, atmospheric piece 'Heaven's Burning Down Tonight' sung in breathy, sexually charged voice. And last, but not the least, fans of Hydrogyn should find familiarity with two among the eleven tracks on the album, both with Julie Westlake on vocals – the melancholic ballad 'Shadow' and feisty Rocker 'Medicate'.

Westlake's self-titled release is something Modern Metal fans should really sink their teeth into and it's a release they are going to enjoy it. Solid song-writing skills backed up with convincing performances and variety of arrangements are this album's strengths. And even though it's not an album staunch traditionalists would fall for right away – perhaps even they will find something for themselves here too...?

Alexandra Mrozowska

WITHIN SILENCE – 'GALLERY OF LIFE' *(Ulterium)* POWER METAL

Within Silence are a young Slovakian Melodic Power Metal band that has been around since 2008 and 'Gallery Of Life' represents their first full album. The band play a tight knit Melodic Metal that has echoes of Stratovarius, Edguy and Helloween, so (just as I did) you'll probably have very good idea as to what they sound like and for the most part you'd be right.

I have to say however that even though WS might have come up with an album that has a lot of what could be termed "fan boy" songs contained within it, the sheer enthusiasm and joy they wring from each track sidelines any negative thoughts you might have and you'll soon find yourself enjoying this fine debut.

This release starts of somewhat strangely (after the obligatory intro) with a song called 'Silent Desire'. The reason for this strangeness is because singer Martin Klein's accent and pronunciation seems to be very poor on it and you immediately start to have fears that the rest of the album might be hampered by the same problem; for some reason…it isn't? His accent is, of course, still there but on the rest of the songs, it is nowhere near as thick or unintelligible as it is on the opening track.

So after you get over that first hurdle, you then get to hear some very strong tracks such as 'Emptiness Of Night', 'Elegy Of Doom', 'The Last Drop Of Blood', 'Love Is Blind', 'Anger And Sorrow' and 'Judgement Day' which could all be classed as very entertaining slabs of Melodic Metal. Each song is full of excellent musicianship and the production of Jan Cvercko brings out all the best elements in WS's music. In the end, for a first album, that is all you can ask for.

As debuts go this is a pretty good one and if this band can keep writing songs of this calibre, whilst continuing to forge a strong identity all their own, then I think that Within Silence will have a great future to look forward to; one of those bands that Power Metal enthusiast might want to keep your eye on.

Ian Johnson

WOODBRIDGE – 'THE FIRE INSIDE' *(Dr Music)* HARD ROCK

'The Fire Inside' is the debut album from a Swiss band who look like they're ready to rumble and Rock like they really mean it. According to their press blurb – "since the middle of the last century Woodbridge have left a clear trace in the worldwide Rock community". I've got to say that they're ageing well – they look quite young to me – and thankfully so is the music!

'...Inside' is fresh, punchy, modern Melodic Rock. At times raw and feel good, at other times a touch angst-ridden with occasional Grunge inflections and charming American drawl but any way you look at it, '...Inside' is a statement of clear intent from a band who sound like they're shaking off the shackles and sprinting for freedom.

'Born To Rumble', 'Forever Loud' and 'Addicted' are raucous as hell and see the band voicing their love of the music and the lifestyle that goes with it. 'Four Wheels Of Freedom' offering reflections from the road although it's not all whiskey-soaked indulgence.

WALLENBERG'S WHISKEY HELL – 'BULLETS 'N' BURRITOS *(Keiler)* SOUTHERN/COUNTRY/FOLK

This band's name sounds heavier than the music that they play, that being a classic blend of Old-School and Southern Rock with a sprinkling of Country, similar to Black Stone Cherry and Lynyrd Skynyrd. Lead singer and guitarist, Olly Wallenberg, explains that Whiskey Hell is like Alice Coopers "Nightmare"; his past experiences with drugs and whiskey being a little on the excessive side. Wallenberg knew that if he did not change his lifestyle it would turn his life into a living hell, hence the name WWH.

Listening to 'Bullets 'N' Burritos', the band's sophomore record following 2013's 'Booze 'N' Boogie', you would be convinced that they came from Alabama, Tennessee or Louisiana and not Hamburg, North Germany. The three-piece are spear-headed by the multi-talented Wallenberg, drummer Lars Lindner and bassist Carsten "Sharky" Meyer.

The album starts with the BSC sounding and typical Southern Rock standard 'Weed 'N' Whiskey' but it is the second track 'Blood, Sweat 'N' Wrenches', with its glorious riff, that really grabs the listener's attention. The early momentum is maintained with the first of two covers, AC/DC's 'Kicked In The Teeth', which never strays too far from the original. 'Time Flies' reduces the tempo, being laid-back Blues, and highlights the warmth to Wallenberg's vocals as opposed to the grit and power he exhibits on the Rockier numbers.

The tattoos are not the only similarities that WWH share with one of my favourite live acts Little Caesar and the song 'Mr Rock 'N' Roll' (dedicated to Lemmy Kilmister) has the vibe of the Californian Rock 'n' Rollers. The title track itself could have been recorded by that "Lil' Ol' Band From Texas", 'POW*MIA' is a heart-wrenching ballad whilst 'Moonshine Boogie' is back in BSC territory. My personal favourite track is 'Hairspray Hell', which has an almost Progressive style with its slow mid-refrain.

With the death of his best friend and separation from his wife in the same year, writing the song '2013' has obviously been cathartic for Wallenberg; however, this "sat round a camp-fire", Country-style song is the only one that I find myself reaching for the skip button during repeated plays.

However, all is forgiven with the superb closing salvo, starting with a magnificent rendition of the Mountain classic 'Mississippi Queen' that sits perfectly with the original numbers. With the fantastic production, courtesy of Timo Höcke, I doubt that this song has ever sounded sonically so good. The album closes with a beautiful instrumental 'Rio Pecos' (the river that runs through New Mexico and Texas) that would not be out of place on a Stevie Ray Vaughn album.

Wallenberg's Whiskey Hell's 'Bullets 'N' Burritos' is an essential album for all lovers of Southern Hard Rock.

Mark Donnelly

The single 'Lies', with its lurching Grungy feel, takes a swipe at self-centred political leaders while 'Lost In Paradise' is an angst-fuelled, ballad-like track that reflects on man's senseless destruction of our planet and, indeed, our species. There's more to these guys, then, than sex, drugs and Rock 'n' Roll.

Personal favourites are the soulful and emotionally engaging 'I Feel Free', which benefits from a killer guitar sound, and the measured 'Don't Hold Me Back' where the band blends male and female vocals on one of the album's strongest melodies.

'...Inside' is a fine debut from a band who "doesn't let themselves be forced into a tight corset". That's good to know as there's plenty of other underwear out there for young Rock and Rollers to try. Woodbridge may not be the finished article yet, but 'The Fire Inside' is an album full of energy, confidence, and, most importantly, good songs. Look out for this bunch, you heard it here first!

Michael Anthony

WORLDVIEW – 'THE CHOSEN FEW' *(M24)* PROGRESSIVE

I hate having to do this, but what we have here is a Christian Metal album. So for those amongst our readership who don't like this sort of thing lyrically, you can move on to the next review. However, if Christian lyrics don't bother you then welcome to the Progressive Melodic Metal of Worldview.

The band itself features ex-members of Sacred Warrior, Deliverance and Recon and they have many years of recording and touring experience under their belts. The closet musical comparison I can (personally) make after listening to this with that of Theocracy.

That said, Worldview do use a more varied musical arsenal than Theocracy, with Eastern, American and British Rock music influences found all over this release. Also in Rey Parra, they have a very strong vocalist who puts his (and their) messages across with great aplomb but doesn't ever seem to be "preaching" to or at you.

The music itself is a fine mix of well played and performed Melodic Prog Metal and Hard Rock; I soon found myself warming to the likes of 'Mortality', 'Back In Time', 'Why', 'Two Wonders', 'Walk Through Fire' and 'The Last Cry'.

There's also an impressive guest list of musicians roped in to help out and lend a hand to proceedings. These include Oz Fox (Stryper), Les Carlsen (Bloodgood), Larry Farkas (ex-Vengeance Rising) and Jimmy P Brown II (Deliverance). A special mention must also go to Bill Metoyer (Fates Warning, Slayer, W.A.S.P.) who's mixing and mastering of 'The Chosen Few' has given the whole album a great sound.

On the flip side, I do have to add that as good as the music is, it's all very samey in terms of pace, especially around the middle section of the album. If the band could have injected just a few more faster-paced songs into their repertoire, then I think this could have been a very good album rather than just a good one.

In the end, Worldview have made a Christian Rock album featuring several good songs with the added bonus of some sturdy performances and strong production values. If there's a second release (hopefully), I can see this act taking off and definitely consider them one to look out for.

Ian Johnson

RE-ISSUES

BULLETBOYS – 'BULLETBOYS' *(Rock Candy)* HARD ROCK

Formed in 1987 by former King Kobra guitarist Mick Sweda, he then set about recruiting fellow KK members Marq Torien (vocals) and Lonnie Vincent (bass), along with teenage drumming sensation Jimmy D'Anda. Together they went the unusual route of getting the songs and style of the band right in the rehearsal studio rather than playing the Sunset Strip clubs like most of their peers. Picked up by Warner, they were paired with producer Ted Templeman for a debut album that continued the sound he'd perfected through Montrose and Van Halen.

It wouldn't be unfair to say that Bulletboys were not really one of the top tier bands from that era, but their self-titled debut has stood the test of time rather well, lyrics notwithstanding! No-nonsense Rockers with a satisfyingly chunky rhythm section, unfussy guitar riffs and the requisite forceful vocals; it was the sound of a simple thing done exceedingly well.

Sometimes there's maybe a little too much reverb on the vocals but catchy Rockers 'Hard As A Rock', 'Kissin' Kitty' and 'F#9' have great separation of the instruments and all the unnecessary fat trimmed off, hence the thirty-four minute running time. As is usual with Templeman, some of the songs end up sounding like other bands he's worked with. The Van Halen-esque 'Shoot The Preacher Down' and stop/start 'Crank Me Up' ('Hot For Teacher' anyone?) being cases in point, as well as the raw groove of 'Owed To Joe', which is Aerosmith with more cowbell.

'Badlands' is a little more original with its unorthodox riff and darker feel, whilst Templeman's suggestion of covering the funky O'Jays classic 'For The Love Of Money' added more variety. It was the dynamic, bass-driven dance floor filler 'Smooth Up In Ya' that went on to become their best-known song, and for good reason, as its still impossible to stay sitting down when you hear it.

The original sounded great, the re-master even better, and although Sweda and D'Anda seem to have very different memories of what went down when they were interviewed for the sleeve essay, I'm disagreeing with Sweda on his low opinion of the final mix.

Phil Ashcroft

DANGER DANGER – 'DANGER DANGER' *(Rock Candy)* HARD ROCK

Despite a steep learning curve that included playing with Michael Bolton (on his 'Everybody's Crazy' tour!), Joe Lynn Turner, an early version of White Lion and replacing Billy Sheehan in Talas, New York bassist Bruno Ravel still had no outlet for the kind of songs he wanted to write. So, in 1987 he got together with long-time friend and drummer Steve West and the duo formed Danger Danger, eventually arriving at a recording line-up that consisted of Prophet singer/drummer Ted Poley, keyboard player Kasey Smith and guitarist Tony "Bruno" Rey. Unfortunately Rey was also a member of Saraya and opted to throw in his lot with the Female-Fronted Rockers when Danger Danger's album was all but complete, so the band brought in phenomenal guitarist Andy Timmons and the classic line-up was complete.

Originally released by CBS in 1989, 'Danger Danger' was a Mecca for lovers of simple and catchy Hard Rock, with huge hooks, soaring vocals, sublime instrumentation and a collection of earworm choruses that have maintained its status as one of the most well-loved albums of its type. Obviously 'Naughty Naughty', 'Bang Bang' and 'Rock America' are the big hitters here, but the ballads 'Don't Walk Away' and 'One Step From Paradise' are equally memorable, whereas slightly less obvious fare like the punchy 'Under The Gun', the brilliant 'Boys Will Be Boys' and the infectious 'Feels Like Love' have also earned their regular places in the live set over the years. Lance Quinn's production still stands up today and the re-master adds clarity and power to an already great sounding release.

If the original album didn't have enough Timmons for you – he only played two solos on the album – the five bonus tracks are the whole of the 'Down And Dirty Live' radio EP with storming versions of '...Boys', '...Bang' and '...Naughty', along with the Timmons' instrumental 'Groove Or Die' and Derringer's 'Rock 'N' Roll Hoochie Koo'.

Although not that hard to get hold of in its original form, the added EP makes a nice bonus to this absolutely essential Party Rock album.

Phil Ashcroft

EDDIE MONEY – 'WHERE'S THE PARTY?', 'CAN'T HOLD BACK' *(Rock Candy)* ROCK

Following Rock Candy's excellent re-issues of Eddie Money's first four albums, the next brace in the impressive back catalogue of the whisky-soaked U.S. vocalist are an abject lesson in what happens when you fail to adapt to the music industry's ever-changing trends.

His fourth album 'No Control' had spawned several hit singles, so he kept faith with producer Tom Dowd and most of the same co-writers and musicians for 1983's 'Where's The Party?' Not a bad album per se, but in the mercurial career of Edward Mahoney a revisit shows it to have been a little safe. While Money was content to carry on with his mix of Rock, Pop, Blues and R&B, innovations in keyboards, drums and recording techniques had resulted in a lot of major label acts going for a more attention-grabbing and hi-tech direction; one which radio programmers and MTV were all over like a rash. There wasn't a hit single on '...Party?' but 'Maybe Tomorrow', 'Leave It To Me' and especially 'Club Michelle' maybe should have been as they're all good examples of what the "Money Man" was all about. The guitar-based 'Back On The Road' was great too and 'Backtrack' is an all-out classic, but sadly in a melancholy "end of the album" type of way; not the type of song labels release as singles. The rest were merely good and didn't make full use of the talents of great players like Steve Farris (Mr Mister), Alan Pasqua (Giant), Mitchell Froom (Gamma) and Gary Ferguson (Hughes-Thrall, Channel). The record sold relatively poorly despite holding up pretty well today.

After an enforced three year hiatus due to debts and serious ill health, Money returned with 'Can't Hold Back', one of the strongest and most successful records of his career. Bringing in the up and coming producer Ritchie Zito and several outside songs did the trick, the man scored hit singles with the catchy Ronnie Spector duet 'Take Me Home Tonight' and the smooth 'Endless Nights', whilst fans of lesser known AOR will probably already know Billy Satellite's 'I Wanna Go Back' and Stan Meissner's excellent 'One Chance'. But Money's own songs consistently hit the spot as well; particularly 'One Love' (check out those hi-tech synths!), the guitar-driven 'We Should Be Sleeping' and the Henry Small (Prism) co-write 'Stranger In A Strange Land'. The traditionally expansive album closer 'Calm Before The Storm' incorporates all of Money's main influences and features a killer arrangement and some of his best vocals.

Jon Astley's re-mastering makes these albums sparkle like never before and Howard Johnson's sleeve interview shows a man who's accepted whatever the world has thrown at him and never looked back. Eddie Money is the real deal and 'Can't Hold Back' is one of his essential albums, but there's some good stuff on 'Where's The Party?' too.

Phil Ashcroft

FALCONER – 'FALCONER: ULTIMATE EDITION' *(Metal Blade)* POWER METAL

The reason behind this re-mastered version of Falconer's debut is that the band will cease to be a touring entity not long after its release (they will though continue to record). So as a thank you, they wanted to give something back to the fans, who had asked for many years for the debut album to be given the production it rightly deserved, hence this 'Ultimate Edition'.

The band also wanted to add a second disc of tracks that featured some unreleased songs plus, as an added bonus, the original demos that got them signed in the first place. So, after some discussions, enter producer/engineer Andy LaRocque who has done a masterful job in beefing up the sound on this (now) almost fifteen year old album.

So what changes have this re-working of 'Falconer' brought to the album sonically? Firstly, and immediately, you can hear the difference LaRocque has made to the bass and drums, which are much heavier and more upfront in the mix than before. The guitars have also received the same treatment giving them a more "in your face" feel, but the real winner here is the vocals of Mattias Blad. These now take centre stage and you can really hear and feel every emotion that he imparts as he sings. 'A Quest For The Crown', 'Heresy In Disguise', 'Lord Of The Blacksmiths' and 'Mindtraveller' were always great songs, but this re-mastering has made them even better and Falconer fans will love revisiting this album; I know I did.

However, it is the above mentioned second disc that is the more interesting of the two. It features acoustic versions of 'Mindtraveller', 'Royal Gallery' and 'Wings Of Serenity' which really prove what a great, unique and individual singer Blad is. His vocals on these songs are hypnotic and they keep you riveted to them as you listen. Lastly, there's the four demo tracks that got them signed to Metal Blade to enjoy. These songs show a young band (at that time) hungry for success and showing just what they had to offer. These versions of 'Mindtraveller', '...Blacksmiths', 'Substitutional World' and 'Entering Eternity' all have a rougher feel and are obviously different from the album versions, providing the listener the opportunity to see and hear just how much work Falconer put into the first album. They are also a nice way for the band to sign off the touring part of their life.

In the end this will appeal more to the Falconer faithful than anyone else, but if you haven't succumbed to the charms of the band yet, then this is a great place to start.

Ian Johnson

FREEDOM CALL – '666 WEEKS BEYOND ETERNITY' *(SteamhammerSPV)* POWER METAL

'Eternity', the third album by Germany Power Metal act Freedom Call, was first unveiled back in 2002. When '666 Weeks Beyond Eternity' was released (April 27th) it was exactly six hundred and sixty-six weeks since the original version of the album

DAMN YANKEES – 'DAMN YANKEES' *(Rock Candy)* HARD ROCK

The debut album by the relatively short-lived "super-group" Damn Yankees was a hit right out of the box, and understandably so given the song-writing talents of Night Ranger's Jack Blades and Styx legend Tommy Shaw. But add in the thunderous drums of Michael Cartellone and Ted Nugent's fiery guitar and nothing could really go wrong, could it?

Well, I must admit that I've always had reservations about anything produced by Ron Nevison from the mid-eighties onwards. His albums always lacked bottom end despite his obvious expertise in producing fine vocals, sparkling keys, sharp guitar sounds and crystal clear arrangements. But that's the whole point of re-mastering albums and Rock Candy have already had excellent results with Nevison's work with Survivor, Eddie Money and Jefferson Starship.

Nevison and the band captured energy in the grooves, the twin guitar-driven 'Coming Of Age' and Shaw-sung ballad 'High Enough' going on to become U.S. hits and dance floor fillers. But that's just the tip of the iceberg; the great groove of 'Damn Yankees', Nugent's blistering 'Piledriver' and the Poppy 'Runaway' are all great Rockers with killer guitar solos, as are the soaring 'Rock City' and 'Mystified', which is cut from the same cloth as another Shaw song, Styx's 'Renegade'. For my money, nothing betters the raunchy 'Bad Reputation', like a grittier NR with a Blades vocal and a stunning breakdown by Shaw, or the brilliant 'Come Again', which builds from an acoustic beginning into an uplifting epic. The bonus track is the single b-side 'Bonestripper' which is another great Rocker that really should have made the album.

As I'd hoped, Cartellone's thumping drums and Blades' bass are far more noticeable in Jon Astley's re-master, giving the music a far bigger kick than the original, which along with the bonus track makes this version a must-have. Malcolm Dome's sleeve interviews leave no doubt that all the members look back on Damn Yankees with excitement and affection, so let's hope that at some point they can find a space in their schedules to get together again.

Phil Ashcroft

came out, for this reason you get the idea behind this cleverly titled re-issue by the band.

This version of 'Eternity' has been has been re-mastered to the Nth degree and it also sees the songs put in a different order, one that gives the album a better flow than the original version. With the songs in their new places, this is (I assume) how the band truly envisioned and wanted the album to be when it was first unleashed.

Despite FC having grown as a band over the intervening years, I will be the first to admit that back at the start they were, shall we say, a little bit of a Helloween clone (no bad thing really). And those comparisons jump out at you as soon as you play 'The Eyes Of The World', 'Flying High', 'Island Of Dreams', 'Bleeding Heart', 'Flame In The Night', 'Metal Invasion', 'Ages Of Power' and 'Warriors'. But even after thirteen years and putting those comparisons to one side, I must say that I have enjoyed listening to this album once again.

You also get a bonus disc of material which generally goes some way in helping you to make that all important decision of whether or not to re-buy. On the '666...' second disc, you'll find ten tracks including one brand new song called '666 Weeks Beyond Eternity' which shows just how far the band have come over the years as musicians and song-writers. There's also four live tracks to get to grips with, three from 2011 and one from 2004 that all show just what a great live act FC are.

After the live stuff, there's a special Folk Metal version of '...Invasion' which is very outlandish, giving the song a completely different texture and atmosphere. The last three tracks are the strangest however, because they are cover versions of FC songs performed by Neonfly, Powerworld and Hannes Braun. Each song is very different from the original, especially Braun's piano/vocal rendition of 'Warriors', but in their own way, they are all very good adaptations.

Whether you will part with your pennies for this release will, I think, depend firstly on how big a fan of the band you are and secondly if there's enough bonus material to float your boat. The choice is ultimately an individual one and yours to make.

Ian Johnson

HONEYMOON SUITE – 'MONSTERS UNDER THE BED' *(Rock Candy)* HARD ROCK

There's no doubting that Honeymoon Suite have their own distinct sound, based around bouncing rhythms, fluid guitar, clever keys and heartfelt vocals, but it's also true that the quintet from the Canadian side of Niagara Falls have never really made two consecutive albums in the same style. Their most successful period went from the unique, New Wave-influenced Pop Rock of their 1984 debut through the big Arena Rocker 'The Big Prize' to the sparser, guitar-based 'Racing After Midnight' in 1988.

By the dawn of the nineties things were changing for the band; they lost their long-time bassist Gary Lalonde and drummer Dave Betts along with the support of the U.S. arm of their label. But the main song-writing team of guitarist Derry Grehan, singer Johnny Dee and returning keyboard player Ray Coburn hooked up with renowned engineer Paul Northfield to make the most varied and mature record of their career thus far.

'Monsters Under The Bed' – completed with the help of session bassist Steve Webster and drummer Jorn Anderson – is still a great sounding album that cherry-picked themes from their first trio of hit records (already re-issued beautifully by Rock Candy last year!) and added even more different elements to the mix.

There was a new-found earthiness to Grehan's guitar on the catchy single 'Say You Don't Know Me' and the gritty Rockers 'If Ya Love Me' and 'Next To You', as well as the downright uncomfortable 'Little Sister' with its dark child abuse/incest subject matter. The contemporary edge they'd always possessed was even sharper on 'Come (Let Me Take You There)', 'Miracle' and the Bon Jovi-ish 'It's Only Love', whilst Ray Coburn added some stunning touches to The Beatles pastiche 'The Road' and the expansive closer 'All I Wanted', as well as the nod towards their early days 'Bring On The Light'. Dee's instantly recognisable vocals bleed passion with some well-thought out lyrics – surely one of the most criminally ignored singers in any genre – and the record is awash with clever little arrangements and instrumental chops that make good songs into truly great ones.

'Monsters Under The Bed' perhaps suffered at the time from not being as immediate as the trio that preceded it, but if you put in a bit of listening time it's one of those albums that'll be with you for the long haul. There are no extras unfortunately, but the superb job done by Jon Astley on the re-master makes this one well worth buying again.

Phil Ashcroft

JANI LANE – 'BACK DOWN TO ONE' *(ZRecords)* HARD ROCK

Yes, this is obviously a re-issue – but a significant one. 'Back Down To One' was the first solo outing for Jani Lane when he first left Warrant; a bonus being that it is being re-released by the original label, Z Records, having up to now been a highly sought after item given it has long been out of print.

Surrounded by controversy his entire life, Lane's talents were somewhat obscured and overshadowed by the goings on during his music career. This album shows his song-writing and singing talents more so then when he was fronting the "Rock sensation" Warrant.

Please don't misunderstand me, Warrant are a very fine band – they were so when Lane was with them and are very much so to this day – it is just that this collection of songs are Lane's alone, and not fashioned to what a band may want or need. So, unencumbered by a set structure, 'Back...' finds Lane fully exploring his song-writing and composition skills. It also displays his pioneering spirit as well.

Some songs on this record are quite introspective; they are written and sung with no apologies offered. It is a "take it as it is" collection and, by the way, it's not hard to do so! Any of the songs here show us how much care Lane took in the writing.

The title track is a great example as are songs such as 'Hooked', 'Don't Trust Me', 'Sick' and the emotive 'Twilight'. At the time of the original release (2003), this outing cemented all that Lane promised in Warrant; it showed all of us that this singer could stand up on his own and convey that same high style Hard Rock that he had delivered for his ex-band mates. Lane could, and did, say a lot in a three minute plus Rock song; 'Back...' is testament to that!

I realise that Lane is no longer with us and that is certainly sad, but his work lives on; with this album his talents are front and centre as is his spirit, so we have a fine reminder of all that was great about Jani Lane – 'Back Down To One'.

Bruce E.J. Atkinson

JELLYFISH – 'BELLYBUTTON', 'SPILT MILK' *(Omnivore)* MODERN/ALTERNATIVE

When Jellyfish released 'Bellybutton' in 1990, the music scene had embraced down-tuned guitars, lumber jack shirts and super depressive lyrics and it seemed that flair and melody was the enemy. For many of us they were a breath of fresh air, musically and visually, looking like the offspring of The Partridge Family, The Beach Boys and The Beatles.

'The Man I Used To Be' is slow-paced, lyrically poignant and beautiful. Singer Andy Sturmer (one of the few standing drummers) possesses a voice of many layers – a husky tenor that Rocks hard. 'That Is Why' is a wall of super slick vocals and sparse musical arrangements whilst The Beatles on overdrive best describes 'The King Is Half Undressed', that is until the mid-point Beach Boys A Cappella vocals wash over you. The Pop Rock perfection of 'I Wanna Stay Home' is the best song Wings never recorded whereas 'She Still Loves Him' may be the most beautiful song ever written about spousal abuse!

Roger Manning infuses addictive, soulful keyboards into every song on offer, capturing all manner of moods and (for me) is the unsung hero in Jellyfish. Big shiny guitars and melodic vocals are on offer as the band taps into the influence of Cheap Trick for 'All I Want Is Everything' before going all Bossa Nova for the hypnotic 'Bedspring Kiss'. Finishing with the one-two punch of the Squeeze-like 'Baby's Coming Back' and 'Calling Sarah', this album is nothing short of a classic.

These "Deluxe" two-disc re-issues each have a host of extras including booklets with liner notes and a ton of live tracks. Included on 'Bellybutton' is an energetic work out of Wings' 'Jet' and, having witnessed the band live myself, I can attest to the performances being something quite special. The demos and unreleased tracks give a clear picture of how thought out the songs were in pre-production and that little was added to the finished versions.

By the time 'Spilt Milk' was released in 1993, they had ditched the bizarre outfits and put together a more mature look, though not at the cost of the delicious melodies. Opening track 'Hush' resonates with a heavy BB style (circa 'Smile') lush a cappella piece. Having Jason Faulkner join on guitar gives this release a harder edge, best displayed on 'Joining A Fan Club' and 'Sebrina, Paste And Plato' complete with super Queen-style harmonies.

'New Mistake' is a masterpiece in song-writing craft, the likes we had not heard since Supertramp graced our airwaves. The quality just never lets up, 'The Glutton Of Symphony' and 'Ghost At Number One' shows the band had a new found depth to their musical construction, with every instrument shining in its role.

The extras are individual live tracks and the whole album in demo form, which captures a more primitive sound. The unreleased songs have a few golden nuggets – 'Watchin' The Rain' is an absolute gem in the style of 1980's Fleetwood Mac while 'I Need Love' is straight out of the Jeff Lynne and George Harrison songbook.

America never embraced Jellyfish, yet the band were quite successful in Europe. It was as if the musical world did not know what to do with them and the band split shortly after 1994. In the years that have followed, they have gathered something of a cult following… hopefully these splendid re-issues will remind us how special the Jellyfish really were.

Ray Paul

WINGER – 'WINGER', 'IN THE HEART OF THE YOUNG' *(Rock Candy)* HARD ROCK

Often misunderstood because of their "pretty boy" image, Winger were one of the most genuinely talented and respected bands of their ilk by anyone who could see beyond their MTV videos. Formed by Alice Cooper alumni Kip Winger and whizz-kid guitarist Reb Beach after the pair met during the Beau Hill-produced sessions for Fiona's 'Beyond The Pale' record. The line-up was completed by virtuoso Dixie Dregs drummer Rod Morgenstein and Winger's fellow Alice Cooper sideman Paul Taylor (keys), although Malcolm Dome's sleeve notes reveal that Taylor didn't play on the 1988 debut album and only joined after the album was completed.

If an immediate impact is what you want with your debut album then look no further than 'Winger' with the triple whammy of 'Madaleine', 'Hungry' and 'Seventeen'; three hard hitting Rockers with killer riffs, huge drums, earworm choruses and arrangements and musicianship that make the term "Hair Metal" seem as ridiculous as it really was. Harnessed together brilliantly by producer Hill, the sheer punchiness of these tunes, along with 'State Of Emergency', 'Time To Surrender' and their version of 'Purple Haze', amongst others, make up the bulk of a classic album. Throw in the beautifully written ballads 'Without The Night' and the understated brilliance of 'Headed For A Heartbreak' (check out Beach's heart-bursting solos!) and you have everything you could ever want from your Melodic Hard Rock. This powerful re-master adds not only the CD-only Rocker 'Higher And Higher' and the 1991 re-mix of '...Heartbreak', but also a re-master of the previously issued demo, 'Never'.

For their second album Winger pushed the envelope a little more, using keyboards more effectively and slipping in those clever arrangement tricks that always make you smile. There were perfectly played, straight-ahead Rockers, of course, and 'Can't Get Enuff', 'Easy Come Easy Go', 'Little Dirty Blonde' and 'Baptized By Fire' all fit the bill, but when the band stretches out with the likes of 'Rainbow In The Rose' and the title track, the effect is simply breathtaking. The Taylor power ballad 'Miles Away' was the big hit single, but the likes of 'In The Day We'll Never See' and 'In The Heart Of The Young' would herald the change of the lyrical content that would come with the next album. The re-master includes the cool Rocker 'All I Ever Wanted' and the single edit of '...Enuff', and whilst I've always preferred the debut, a re-evaluation of the second album puts them much closer together than I thought. The sleeve interviews with Dome complete the definitive versions of two of the best records released in that era.

Phil Ashcroft

MOTT – 'DRIVE ON', 'SHOUTING AND POINTING' *(Rock Candy)* ROCK

After the departure of both Ian Hunter and Mick Ronson from Mott The Hoople in 1974, remaining members Overend Watts (bass), Morgan Fisher (keys) and Dale Griffin (drums) formed the spin-off band Mott with guitarist Ray Major and vocalist Nigel Benjamin. Intending to be harder hitting, but still emphasising their links to their illustrious past, the band went straight into the studio to launch themselves with the self-produced 'Drive On'.

Commercial Rock and Roll was the order of the day; not a million miles away from whence they came but with the joyous vocals of Benjamin pushing mostly Watts-written tunes like 'By Tonight', 'Monte Carlo', 'The Great White Wail' and 'She Does It' into a Rockier direction. The Pop side of the band was still evident on the inventive 'Stiff Upper Lip' and the infectious 'It Takes One To Know One', along with quality ballads 'I'll Tell You Something', 'Here We Are' and 'Apologies', all based around Fisher's great piano work and Benjamin's heartfelt vocals. Watts sang the excellent 'Love Now' himself, and this version also features the single b-side 'Shout It All Out', a laid-back tune that's just as musical as anything else here. Produced by the band themselves, 'Drive...' was a rough diamond with many appealing qualities.

The 1976 follow-up 'Shouting And Pointing' was another step forward. Co-produced by the legendary Eddie Kramer (Alice Cooper, Kiss, Aerosmith), more chances were taken and the song-writing and arrangements offered much more. Divided into the "Shouting Side" and the "Pointing Side", the former in particular was "all killer, no filler", through the powerful guitar attack of the title track, the dense Rocker 'Collision Course', raucous 'Storm' and the stirring mini Rock Opera 'Career (No Such Thing As Rock 'N' Roll)'. Benjamin had really grown into the role of front-man and everyone was helping out with the writing. On the flipside 'Hold On, You're Crazy' is a quirky Rocker with a great riff, 'See You Again' is a beautifully written Pop song, 'Too Short Arms (I Don't Care)' is a cool Boogie workout and 'Good Times' is a lively version of the old Vanda/Young chestnut that the band made their own. The bonus track is a different mix of '...Arms', which is not really needed, but the album was an improvement on 'Drive ...' and should have taken the band to a higher level. Unfortunately Joe Elliott was one of the few who really loved the band and Benjamin left before the band re-grouped as British Lions, but that's another story.

The sleeve notes by MTH biographer Campbell Devine and Elliott depict a band who weren't really given a chance after the departure of their two main stars, which is a shame as Mott showed great promise with these two records. They're not absolute classics but the best bits are impossible to ignore.

Phil Ashcroft

PRETTY BOY FLOYD – 'KISS OF DEATH: A TRIBUTE TO KISS' *(Deadline)* HARD ROCK

When is Pretty Boy Floyd not Pretty Boy Floyd? When there's only two guys left in the band and the pair of Steve "Sex" Summers (vocals) and Kristy "Kash" Majors (well, everything else) decide to record fifteen Kiss covers.

"Where's the point in that then?" you may rightly ask and when you factor in that 'Kiss Of Death' has been available on the PBF website since 2010, who am I to argue? So what do the Pretty ones add to the Kiss canon then? Not a lot, truth be told; arrangements barely fiddled with and Summers illustrating that Paul Stanley and Gene Simmons are far better singers than they're often given credit for.

All of which results in the usually (ahem) strutting 'Strutter' suddenly becoming a plod along and 'Shout It Out Loud' barely raising its voice. Kudos however, that less expected selections such as the hugely underrated 'Room Service', which successfully takes on a Sleazy persona, and 'Goin' Blind', which doesn't translate so smoothly, are tackled. These aside, other plus points are hard to find.

Unsurprisingly only two tracks come from anything other than the first six Kiss studio albums, the 'Creatures Of The Night' pair of 'I Love It Loud' and 'Creatures...' itself are utterly murdered by Summers; the former sorely lacking the Demon's touch and the latter the Starchild's pouting pizzazz.

This is non-essential even for a Kissaholic like myself and I'd guess that if you're a Pretty Boy Floyd fanatic, then you picked this up first time round. So what's the point of this album? Good question...

Steven Reid

SILVERCHAIR – 'FROGSTOMP: 20th ANNIVERSARY DELUXE EDITION' *(Sony)* MODERN/ALTERNATIVE

In April 1995 'Frogstomp' became the first debut album by an Australian act to enter the National Album Chart at Number One; it would be the first of five Number One albums by Silverchair. The band were formed in 1992 in Newcastle, just North of Sydney, by Daniel Johns (lead vocals/guitar), Ben Gillies (drums) and Chris Joannou (bass) who were, at the time, still at primary school and only twelve years of age. It is hard to believe that when recording commenced they were still only fourteen and fifteen year old boys.

I have to admit that when I heard some of the 'Frogstomp' material twenty years ago it was dismissed because it was so similar to much of the music that was emanating from Seattle as part of the Grunge movement. Even now, listening through the album, Nirvana comparisons are simply unavoidable. The song structures and vocal delivery bring to mind everything that I hated back then when the likes of Pearl Jam, Alice In Chains and Cobain's outfit were in the process of bringing an end to Melodic Rock and AOR's domination of the American airwaves.

Opener 'Israel's Son' sets a tone that is carried through the album's eleven tracks, from the up-tempo angst of 'Pure Massacre' and instrumental 'Madman' to the reflective melancholy of 'Suicidal Dream' and mournful sufferance and pleading of 'Shade'. The overall downbeat nature does become a little tiresome as the album progresses and I was searching for any crumb of uplifting musical comfort after repeat plays. One thing that cannot be denied however is how astonishing an accomplishment 'Frogstomp' was considering the ages of those involved, albeit aided by producer Kevin Shirley's assured guidance.

This '20th Anniversary Deluxe Edition' comes with a second disc of material that includes the four tracks from the original 'Tomorrow' EP and a number of 'Frogstomp' tracks recorded live at the Cambridge Hotel in 1995, which followed the album's release.

I actually prefer the version of 'Tomorrow' (a song written by Johns when only twelve) found on the EP as the sound is not as diluted and it seems to have more vibrancy. The live recordings are raw and energetic, displaying a youthful exuberance alongside a powerful delivery.

Silverchair have become something of an institution in their native Australia and though their sound has matured considerably since this debut release, their attitude was still in evidence when an indefinite hiatus was announced in 2011. This is certainly one for the pink and fluffy purists to avoid; but for those with a broader musical appreciation, the 'Frogstomp' 20th Anniversary Deluxe Edition' (which also contains a DVD that didn't come with my digital copy) should contain enough to warrant a purchase.

Dave Bott

SKY – 'FIVE LIVE: DELUXE EDITION' *(Cherry Red/Esoteric)* PROGRESSIVE

When this double album came out in 1983, Sky were on a bit of a high; their third album had been a chart botherer and much was expected of this Aussie tour document. Shame it didn't chart well, as it's well recorded with a clarity that's essential for such a band of light and shade and, of course, it's brilliantly played. In some ways, the rather anodyne nature of some of their recordings is not an issue here – this has the tenor of a genteel event, the audience silent throughout the playing, clapping at the end; a real celebration of the music.

And they find a groove much more than on 'Cadmium', Alan Parsons certainly makes an appearance on a bubbly, smooth 'KP1', but is nothing compared to its sequel, faster and urgent and a plank which, although it may not be spanked, is certainly given a good bashing. John Williams and Kevin Peek enjoying the freedom, whilst Steve Gray gets an organ solo to relish.

There are quiet, slow and rather eyelid closing pieces here too. None more so than 'The Animals', a twenty minute-plus bore, redolent with slow rises and no apparent destination - it supposedly celebrates all animals, the ones sleeping, I presume. We also have the woozily atmospheric 'The Swan' and 'The Bathroom Song' which is a sing-along joke as funny as a Jack Whitehall telethon, but that groove is often apparent, joyously dancing around the Jazzy lounge sound with a piano solo of 'Meheeco' and it's even there in Tristan Fry's rattling drum solo on the gently pulsating 'Hotta' which finally uncorks an unbridled solo.

Sky were always an oddity. Their studio output could seem studied, the mix not quite right, but live that isn't an issue; the sheer quality of the playing, the breadth of the influence, the wide ranging booklet, makes those qualms disappear. Sometimes somnolent, but also sometimes active.

Steve Swift

THRUST – 'FIST HELD HIGH'/'REINCARNATION' *(Metal Blade)* HEAVY METAL

Thrust were one of a number of bands who featured on Metal Blade's famous 1980's compilations 'Metal Massacre' (the series that shed light on the early recordings of bands like Metallica, Metal Church and Slayer) and their 1984 debut album 'Fist Held High' is an album that is nowadays regarded as a cult classic. However, Thrust never really made it to the true Pantheon Of Metal; their 1988 album 'Reincarnation' was shelved for almost thirty years and the group itself fell into obscurity. A tepid reception to their 2002 comeback album 'Invitation To Insanity' didn't help matters either.

Now, with the arrival of the band's 35th Anniversary, Metal Blade have decided to unleash the ultimate treat for everyone who's ever pumped their fist and screamed along to Thrust; a double album that includes '...High', the long-lost 1988 unreleased album and some rarities. The main attraction is obviously the re-released classic album '...High' that is, simply put, all things Metal – almost an encyclopaedic definition of the genre. From the title through to the raw, rough sound with distinctive influences of NWOBHM and classically clichéd lyrics, it's the early Traditional/Power Metal at its best.

The riffs are heavy and muscular, juxtaposed with pounding rhythm section work with the band's lead singer (at the time – John Bonata) screaming his head off. Just take a quick look over the track listing – from the title track to 'Metallic Attack', 'Heavier Than Hell' and 'Posers Will Die' – and you'll find it urgent to check if that bleached denim vest with patches and pins from 1984 still fits! Apart from eight songs that were included on the original release, this new version also includes five live recordings. Four of them were released in 1982 on the 'Solidarnosc - Rock For Poland' compilation in support of the Solidarity (Solidarnosc) movement during and right after the Martial Law period in Poland. A bit of relatively recent history of my homeland – but first and foremost, Thrust's raw energy captured on record. The final track is the live rendition of 'Destructer' from the 'Metal Massacre IV' compilation (1983).

The inclusion of both the five earlier, pre-'...High' live recordings, the cult album itself and then the previously unreleased 'Reincarnation' (and assorted demos) on the second disc really shows the band's evolution. The juxtaposition of 1984's '...High' and 'Reincarnation' is particularly interesting – on the latter, the group's sound is not as raw and rough due to slicker production (by Bob Kulick).

'Reincarnation' also features a few more catchy songs ('Wasted' and 'Get Crazy') which could be claimed to even be a bit Skid Row-ish. However, it's still the same Thrust we knew from their debut album, always ready to deliver a handful of fist-pumping anthems driven by the Judas Priest-esque twin guitar attack and pounding rhythm. The album's slow moments are the proverbial fly in the ointment – the vocals during 'God Only Knows' and the ballad-esque parts of 'The Fool' are, for the lack of a courteous euphemism, simply terrible. As for the handful of demo recordings that are also included, the quality is good and the songs are an interesting insight into the sphere of band's unpolished, unfinished creative ideas. Some of these might have been developed to perfection and contribute to Thrust's big breakthrough, but – for some reason or another – it never happened.

There are certain reasons why Thrust's 'Fist Held High' remains a cult classic more than thirty years after it was released and why the band's logo made it onto the vests and jackets of some many Metalheads of that time. It was due to the excellent music itself but also because of their sound captured all the things each of us knows from our own youth – angst, rebellion, alienation... all the things true Metal music was always about. That's why it was high time someone reminded us Thrust deserved far more recognition than they actually had.

Alexandra Mrozowska

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SHORT - SHARP - SHOTS OF - ROCK!

Steven Reid takes a look at new EP releases

Short Sharp Shots may seem very happy clappy this issue, with nearly everything featured receiving some love. However, with enough EPs landing on the doormat and in the inbox in recent weeks to fill this page four times over, the chaff has been let fly free…let's savour the wheat.

That the eight track EP 'HERE WE COME' from **RED HALO** opens with a dirty, faithful, cover of the Drivin' & Cryin' classic 'Fly Me Courageous' should tell you exactly what to expect here. Not as refined as D&C, there's still a classy Rock & Roll ethos strongly in evidence across 'Heart Will Know' and 'Don't Be Shy'. The need to put the foot down is always resisted, with RH instead hitting hard in an easy, yet utterly memorable manner. Although things do tail off towards the end of the disc with 'Still Think About You' unintentionally reminding of the Danger Danger track of similar name, but without the MHR razzle dazzle. Still this is strong stuff.

Offering up a "radio edit" alongside the full album version of 'RESURRECTION DAY', **THUNDER** highlight one of the stand-out tracks from their excellent 'Wonder Days' album. The song's inspirational tale centres around the band's guitarist Ben Matthews and his recent fight with cancer, and the lyrics certainly hit hard, yet uplift the spirits. However don't fret if you already have the album, there is a superb acoustic 'Don't Say That' and live take on Thin Lizzy's 'The Rocker' being excellent additions. As an i-Tunes exclusive, when you buy this little cracker you also receive a live video of Thunder firing on all cylinders during the track 'Black Water'. Who could ask for more?

With vocalist Mayo Petranin now the full-time front-man in **SIGNUM REGIS**, the Slovakians announce his arrival with the six track blast 'THROUGH THE STORM'. Four new songs nestle alongside smart re-recordings of 'All Over The World' from the band's 2008 debut and the rather excellent Yngwie Malmsteen rip-roarer 'Vengeance/Liar'. Petranin possesses the right mix of power and ferocity to make both songs his own, while the four newbies signal good times ahead. 'Through The Desert, Through The Storm' is a razor sharp slice of Melodic Power Metal, while 'My Guide In The Light' adds a soupçon of Symph. A full-length album due later this year should be very interesting indeed!

A short taster ahead of their forthcoming album 'Guilty As Sin', **GIRLSCHOOL** persuades us with their 'PROPAGANDA'. It's a convincing campaign, the hypnotic repeat of 'Come The Revolution' insistently reverberating round your head, while the wonderfully titled 'Take It Like A Band' is a traditional G-school, foot to the floor, Motörhead romp. Keeping up their tradition of taking unusual songs and making them their own, 'Staying Alive' – yes, The Bee Gees 'Staying Alive' – shouldn't work as a mid-paced ZZ Top stomper but it does! If this is a taste of what's to come, '...Sin' will be much more than a guilty pleasure.

Although he's from Switzerland, in places you'd be hard pressed to tell singer/song-writer **RETO BURRELL** from Tom Petty. It's Americana all the way and while 'LUCKY CHARM' is being billed as an album, running at just over thirty-one minutes marks it out as a Short Sharp Shot in our book. However, whether through 'Lucky Charm' itself, or 'Can't Break The Rules/Hole In My Chest', the authenticity of what Burrell serves up is unquestionable. A serious surprise and seriously good.

And now SSSOR leaves you in the capable hands of our resident Prog expert Gary Marshall who's here to talk about a re-recording of the exquisite **STEVE HACKETT** instrumental 'Spectral Mornings'... Put together by **ROB REED** (Magenta) with an array of Prog luminaries including Hackett himself and with the proceeds going to aid Parkinson's Disease research, 'SPECTRAL MORNINGS 2015' (Esoteric Records) is different, as Dave Longdon (Big Big Train) was asked to create lyrics for it. The result just goes to reinforce my contention that the very best instrumentals have a lyrical quality. Longdon and Christina Booth (Magenta) share the vocal duties and this works beautifully. There are four different versions on offer, all of which are splendid... Thanks Gary, now back to your regular programme…

There's a strong whiff of Nickelback about **ADELITAS WAY** yet this indie release, after the band parted with Virgin, marks something of a "let's start again" moment. The grooves are deep rooted and the vibe an upbeat kick, as 'Filthy Heart' and 'Harbor The Fugitive' burst forth with real intent. The most immediate smack comes from the insistent 'I Get Around', although the slower grind of 'Sometimes You're Meant To Get Used' makes its own lasting mark. With a full-length release due later in the year, 'DESERVE THIS' deserves attention.

When Mr Symphonic – that's the Reviews Ed to you and me – casually mentions that he might like to keep the physical copy of 'PSALMS OF ZAHYIN' by London's **CALATRILLOZ**, you know there's a good chance they'll be a band to make you sit up and take notice. And so it proves, even if things can become a little over adventurous at times, with the Operatic hit of the theatrical (in a Dennis DeYoung kind of way) 'Lords Of Misery' neatly playing against the grating riff of 'I'm Alive'. Hiding behind some King Diamond-esque make-up and filling their website with tales of circus troupes, marionettes and demons is as likely to have some running for the hills as it will draw others in. However, give the powerfully Symphonic thrust and parry, with a hint of Opera and musicals, a chance and this lot are sure to impress.

Good, now that the Reviews Ed is busy with his new release, let's not tell him that 'DOWN AND OUT' from Norfolk-based **BAD TOUCH** breaks all the SSSOR rules. Not only is it two years old and contains thirteen songs, it's (shhhhh.....) nearly fifty-four minutes long. However having been blown away with the band's set when opening for The Answer earlier this year and taken by James Gaden's review of their official debut album 'Half Way Home' last issue, I had to check out the band's self-proclaimed (but incorrectly categorised!) debut EP. I wasn't disappointed, the band oozing with Bluesy Classic Rock delights as 'Down', 'Dr. Heartbreak', 'Poison In A Pretty Dress' and 'Lying And Losin'' leave no doubt this lot had what it takes to get noticed right from the off. '...Home' may be a step up in class but '...Out' introduced BT on the up and up.

Do we really need another Black Sabbath/Dio-influenced act? Well when they're as good as **EXORCISM**, maybe we do. Make no bones about it, 'WORLD IN SIN' isn't pretending to be anything other than what it is; another disciple of Dio, however their homage is utterly convincing. In truth, this isn't a band, the five tracks presented are all about Csaba Zvekan, who plays most of the instruments, however with musicians of the standard of, amongst many, Joe Stump (Raven Lord, Reign Of Terror) contributing, the results are way higher than those of most "one man" projects. Factor in Zvekan putting in a superb shift with his Dio-esque (surprise, surprise) vocals and this EP really hits hard and really hits heavy.

Made up of guys from Pig Iron, Sons Of Merrick, Profane and Howl Griff, **PERFECT FAULT** may be a time-filler project but 'ELECTRIC MOUNTAIN' is anything but quickly thrown out fluff. Instead, there's a vitality about the sharp sounds and sharper words this outfit produce. Deep and dark yet bouncy and jumping 'Headstrong' and the gritty 'Cup Runneth Over' make a sharp impression. 'Flower On The Lamppost' adds a 1980s Talking Heads slice of oddness, while 'Dodo' grins with a vicious glinting threat. Although a little off the wall in places, PF are too good to be a flash in the pan.

London-based **MORDECAI** screech into view on a sound which fuses thumping Rock à la Black Stone Cherry, the riff power of Mastodon and a little pinch of the Modern. It works a treat, 'All Wrong' being all right and 'Rise' having no problem peaking for the occasion. Big guitars are the name of the day while Dan M Hicks does a great job of backing up the superb riffs on vocals. However, if you hear the single from 'VALOUR', 'Just One Life', keep in mind that this mid-paced effort is actually the weakest of the five on the EP. Don't be put off though; the other four tracks are truly killer!

Hammering out Rock & Roll meets Bluesy debauchery via some of the Southern-tinges so popular right now, Germany's **THE LEGENDARY** drum up a rollicking good time. The chugga-lugga wallop of 'If I Was A Girl' rolls as hard as it Rocks (and the lyrics are worth an intentional chuckle too), as 'Gallows Tree' surges with deeper intent. Although 'I Wish I Had A Beer As Cold As Your Heart' (Song Title Of The Month goes to…!) featuring Mary Jane Bonamassa on vocals brings that Country twang to proceedings. Far from as throwaway as they'd have you believe, the 'PIRATES' EP may relieve you of all your doubloons but it'll leave you with a hearty grin on your chops and a bottle of rum in your hand. The band's more recent two track single 'KISSIN' KATE'/'FEEL SOME' is even better!

Long standing members of the European Melodic Progressive Power Metal scene, Sweden's **HARMONY** return with 'REMEMBRANCE'. Featuring the same line-up which gave us the 2014 'Theatre Of Redemption' album, including guest lead vocalist Daniel Heiman (ex-Lost Horizon), this release rather spectacularly re-works four tracks from the band's 'Dreaming Awake' debut while adding two new songs. All four of the re-imagined cuts are of the highest calibre, 'She' and 'Without You' smashing through with tumultuous guitars and soaring keys. Add in an excellent display from Heiman and this is one set of re-records worth bothering with. However, the new offerings, 'In His Heart' and 'Feed My Hunger', up the riff-infused ante further, both suggesting the next instalment of Harmony will be essential stuff.

And finally, Record Store Day may have passed for 2015 but with it always being an occasion which provides plenty of interesting shorter releases (mainly on vinyl), here's a quick update of what's still available out there if you root around… 'MEANWHILE IN BURBANK' is an excellent covers release featuring tracks from Kiss, Metallica, Judas Priest, Alice In Chains and Black Sabbath from **STONE SOUR**; the first of three such releases, this is a beauty. A self-titled release from **DOWN 'N' OUTZ** (they seem to have dropped the "Joe Elliott's" part from their name) finds three album cuts augmented with a live version of their recent "set opening" take on the Elton John classic 'Funeral For A Friend/Love Lies Bleeding', which is simply a must for the band's fans. The increasingly prevalent **BLACKBERRY SMOKE** provide 'WOOD, WIRE & ROSES', where five acoustic versions from their towering 'Holding All The Roses' album are stripped back superbly. Add in a cover of the Tom Waits number, 'Old Shoes (And Picture Postcards)' and this is the best Record Store Day release of the year. However not far behind is a natty 10" red vinyl of 'WHEN THE MUSIC PLAYED' by **THUNDER**, or indeed the cassette only 'NO LIFE 'TILL LEATHER' from **METALLICA**, the band's early demo officially released for the first time.

MULTIMEDIA

ELECTRIC LIGHT ORCHESTRA – 'OUT OF THE BLUE: LIVE AT WEMBLEY' *(Eagle Vision)* ROCK

What we have here is a collection of many of the best ELO recorded live performances that are available, plus videos from the 1979 'Discovery' album. The sound is in uncompressed stereo and DTS-HD Surround with a smart and easy to use menu.

The original VHS and first DVD release of the London Wembley 1978 show gave rise to the belief that the band was blatantly miming, something they never quite shook off. Studio tracks were added to the audio in post-production due to technical issues with the sound, giving the false impression of lip syncing. The band did indeed use some backing tapes but only to keep time and add harmonies during live performances.

This release has the original live audio as ELO played it on the night; sadly the complete unedited show has never been released. The sound is somewhat cluttered, an issue they struggled with throughout the tour. Trying to replicate the string section in a live arena was a big problem but despite that, this release still shows the band at the top of their game offering an incredible performance; complete with the legendary spaceship.

The introduction of said spaceship and first number 'Standing In The Rain' is still awe inspiring to watch and this BluRay edition certainly brings out the colours to fine effect. Some of the awful visual effects added at the time unfortunately make some of the songs difficult to watch. All seven band members are kitted out in white silk suits, complete with two cello players and a violinist. All the hits from 'Mr Blue Sky' to 'Sweet Talkin' Woman' to 'Showdown' are played superbly with the encore consisting of 'Roll Over Beethoven' throwing in a touch of string-based organised chaos.

The Wembley show may be the spectacle, but the 'Fusion 76' presentation has a superior sound and a more varied set-list. Just prior to the mega-success of 'A New World Record', this was a leaner version of ELO. What the band lacked in stage presence, they more than made up for in musicianship and song craft. 'Strange Magic' with drummer Bev Bevan out front helping out on vocals is a real highlight while obscure tracks like 'Poker' and 'Nightrider' are a treat too.

'Live At Brunel University 1973' and 'Rockpalast 1974' are two great shows, the latter showing the band in early Prog Rock mode and clearly a lot looser on stage. A brief interview with the band has been included with singer Jeff Lynne looking a little worse for wear!

Finally, we have the complete videos from the 'Discovery' album, something that was unheard of at the time. All are studio mimed with some warm seventies animation added for effect and clearly show the confidence the record company had in ELO in 1979. The best I think is 'Dairy Of Horace Wimp', though having 'Wishing' and 'Need Her Love' as obscure additions is a nice touch.

All in all, this is a terrific retrospective collection of one England's greatest Rock bands.

Ray Paul

KANSAS – 'MIRACLES OUT OF NOWHERE' *(Sony)* PROGRESSIVE

With sales of over 30 million albums worldwide, Kansas are maybe not as well known or respected in the U.K. and Europe as perhaps they should be. However, that doesn't take away from the fact that they're widely regarded as the best U.S. exponents of that most English of music genres; Progressive Rock. 'Miracles Out Of Nowhere' is the long-awaited documentary film about their rise from the wheat fields of Topeka, Kansas to chartbusting, multi-platinum, stadium headliners. Whilst it seems to stop abruptly at the peak of their success (before personality clashes would tear the line-up apart), what you get is very interesting accounts from all six members about the period of their career from 1973 to 1977.

The band, producer Jeff Glixman and members of the management and music impresario Don Kirshner's record label, as well as fans and peers like Garth Brooks and Brian May, tell the story with reverence and eloquence, largely steering away from the negative and concentrating mostly on the phenomenal music. It's apparent that the band were grateful for the faith shown in them by Kirshner (how many bands these days would be given until their fourth release to become successful?), but despite their humble words you get the impression that they knew deep down that the songs of Kerry Livgren, the golden voice of Steve Walsh and Robbie Steinhardt's expressive violin would eventually combine to reap rewards.

The story of their breakthrough 'Leftoverture' record and hit single 'Carry On Wayward Son' is particularly interesting, with the band eagerly awaiting Livgren's arrival at the studio every day to see what he'd come up with the previous night. The respect for each other's skills is evident, even from the usually dour Walsh who surprisingly merits their success to Livgren despite their well-documented song-writing battles. The film ends with the band revisiting the scene of the back cover photo of their forty year old debut album and recreating that photo; there's also a funny story involving Steven Tyler that I'll leave you to discover for yourself.

The companion CD contains thirteen important tracks from those first five records, each prefaced by comments from the documentary, and whilst I'm not really a fan of mixing dialogue with music on a CD, it works pretty well here. Maybe another film will one day be made to cover the period from 1978 onwards, but for now this excellent recounting of their formative years is essential viewing for any fan of the band.

Phil Ashcroft

PETER GABRIEL – 'PLAY' *(Eagle Rock)* PROGRESSIVE

"Who was the lead singer in Genesis before Phil Collins? Put your answer on a postcard and send it to the Peter Gabriel competition..." Ah yes, Smashie & Nicey taking the fun with a less than cutting edge Genesis – their white boy Soul direction after The Big G left is the subject of many pub arguments, but you cannot accuse Gabriel of taking the least line of resistance.

His work has been interesting at worst, sublime at best, always challenging and often perversely odd; he has constantly pushed himself, even during his most commercial 'So' phase and his canon of breathtaking songs is testament to his talent.

It's about more than music though; one could sneeringly refer to it as vertical integration, but Gabriel has followed his heart to touch tech and society in his own way. And videos are part of that; he has produced some corkers...

You're probably thinking about 'Sledgehammer', aren't you? Nothing wrong with that at all, that avowedly odd collection of stop/go animation was a hit, a gorgeously entertaining addendum to a rather tasty song. But that's not all, he's constantly tried to take a holistic view of his music and so the videos are not just "Gabriel and the band play the song" but little pieces of art in their own right.

And that's why this DVD collection is so wonderful. Entertaining and exciting, yes, but thoughtful and artistic too. They are all here; the groundbreaking 'Sledgehammer', companion piece 'Big Time', the audacity of the lack of movement in 'Don't Give Up' as Gabriel and Kate Bush clutch onto each other for the whole thing, the "iflookscouldkilltheyprobablywill" (as it sounds to me like it's sung) in 'Games Without Frontiers' and the visually arresting, washed out 'Shock The Monkey'.

Makes you remember all those other wonderful examples; the riot of colour that is 'Kiss That Frog', Sean Penn's odd blood flowing denouement to 'The Barry Williams Show', 'Biko' live and an arresting cobbled together 'Solsbury Hill' from two other videos and a film which is beautiful. Lastly of note there's a stark 'Father, Son' with his own home movies which could bring a tear to a glass eye.

Of course, this was released in 2004 and apart from new videos for 'Washing In The Water' and 'In Your Eyes', plus a 5.1 sound spit and polish, the previous purchaser will be potentially buying for the extras. They're a mixed bag of the refreshingly open and defiantly odd segue live '...Frontiers', a brash 'Tommy' meets 'Rollerball' video for 'Modern Love' and some of the trailers, ranging from behind the scenes jollity to salesman brio for 'A Family Portrait', 'Growing Up Live' and 'Secret World Live', plus some great pithy and arresting intros to some of the videos. Worth it? The jury is still out.

Taken all together, this is a brilliant romp through a singular artistic talent. For those who already have it, why not dive to deeper fathoms? For those who don't, this is an absolute pearler.

Steve Swift

RICK SPRINGFIELD – 'STRIPPED DOWN' *(earMUSIC)* ROCK

Okay, so this DVD/CD combination wasn't exactly what I was hoping for with a title like that (ahem!), but what it actually contains is the culmination of Rick Springfield's ongoing acoustic shows where he tells all sorts of tales about his childhood, the stories behind the songs and in some cases, he even interrupts himself to tell the audience about his experiences in some hilarious ways.

My favourite of these is 'Painted Girl' where he does just that. It's one of the first songs he ever wrote, but certainly a track with a definite adult perspective; the results are hilarious.

Along with the expected hits like 'Jessie's Girl', 'Human Touch' and 'Love is Alright Tonight', Springfield also offers up a couple of his own personal favourites – surprisingly, Fleetwood Mac's 'Oh Well', Badfinger's 'Baby Blue' and the Blues classic 'Rollin' And Tumblin".

I've always found it very hard to listen to the heartbreaking 'My Father's Chair', but having the song explained in such a personal way by the writer was a joy. The one new track on the album, 'If Wishes Were Fishes', is a cleverly written and highly amusing take on life with lines like "I wish people would stop calling me Rick Springsteen"...now that really did make me laugh out loud!

Considering the show consists of Springfield, an acoustic guitar and a laptop, it's fantastic. The sound quality of the recording is wonderful and if you listen on headphones, it's like you're in the room with him. As for the DVD's visual perspective, it shows him surrounded by his fans at close quarters and the intimacy of what is basically a lounge gig, is superb.

Springfield's self-deprecating, tongue-in-cheek delivery added to his brilliant vocal performance is to be commended. A definite winner for me (and he didn't even have to take his shirt off).

Sue Ashcroft

STEVE VAI – 'STILLNESS IN MOTION: VAI LIVE IN L.A.' *(Sony/Legacy)* INSTRUMENTAL

The guitar legend that is Steve Vai has never ceased to amaze in his extensive career, and this DVD is a perfect illustration of that. Containing a two and a half hour Los Angeles show along with the huge sum of three and a half hours of tour diary, this release showcases his unquestionable ability to play his God-like melodies and powerful riffs as well as offering a closer look into his life on the road (including footage and pictures with his wife and sons, crew and band mates).

In August 2012, Vai embarked on a two-year world tour that took him to places as diverse as France, Israel, Mexico, Japan and Russia. For the L.A. gig at Club Nokia, he had a TV station offering to film the evening, hence the footage obtained from the nine cameras – one of them on the actual guitar neck – which is totally impeccable, equally matched by the impressive sound which is crystal clear as you could expect from anything Vai-related.

If you attended any of the shows, watching the live footage will automatically take you back to that state of mesmerisation; if you didn't, at least you will be able to experience it from your own sofa. The set-list flows through different dynamics and was mainly focused on the most recent (at the time) album 'The Story Of Light'; selections include, amongst others, the magical 'Weeping China Doll' and the ferocious 'John The Revelator', to which he welcomed Beverly McClellan onstage to sing it (as she did on the album). However, treasures like 'Whispering A Prayer', 'For The Love Of God and 'The Audience Is Listening' were also incorporated from previous albums as was 'The Ultra Zone'.

An impressive musician needs to be surrounded by equally talented band members and that is why guitarist Dave Weiner, drummer Jeremy Colson and bassist Philip Bynoe haven't left Vai's side in years. They are such a good, solid band that everything runs flawlessly and the boss even lets them shine on their own, such as allowing Weiner to play a track from his acoustic album. Everyone knows how fresh Vai keeps his live shows (examples are his continuous change of clothes, impressive stage lights, and on-stage jokes), hence the reason he invited harpist Deborah Henson-Conant to the stage with her lit electric harp, something which adds a wealth of colour to the music.'Stillness In Motion: Vai Live In L.A.' is a fantastic way to learn more about the guitar maestro by the way of both his extraordinary music and his curious personality, which shows him doing the "touristy" things in the places he travels to. Get an afternoon off and indulge in this release. He is very proud of it and so he should be.

Mónica Castedo-López

BOOKMARK

Rob McKenzie provides an overview of essential reading for music lovers everywhere

'100 YEARS OF BRITISH MUSIC' *(Omnibus Press)*

The Performing Rights Society was created in 1914 and from then on administered the rights (originally for sheet music, then records, CDs and now including, of course, digital) for British writers and publishers.

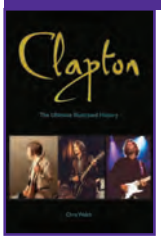
This coffee table hardback book has a simple format – one page covering the highlights of a song-writing luminary and then a single artistic full page portrait photo in black and white. This a historic record of the PRS, so there are people from the early twentieth century such as Vaughn Williams and Gustav Holst – all interesting and we all know the tunes (I picked out Holst because of his Rainbow connection!). Regarding Rock, the classic acts are all there (apart from Deep Purple as always!), so Led Zepplin, The Rolling Stones, Ray Davies and The Beatles are given their due.

This is a real souvenir of British Music and although the text sets the scene, the real interest is the quality of the photographs shown off to the max in this large format and high quality printed book. The other thing of note is the sheer magnitude of song-writing talent from these shores; from the modern era, Gary Barlow and Adele are included – from the Rock world, Muse is highlighted.

In summary, this is a quality memento of British song-writers, a readable reference book and, in general, a celebration of the first one hundred years of the PRS.

In closing, it was also nice to see Iron Maiden and Status Quo being featured and noted as contributing to British music.

'CLAPTON : THE ULTIMATE ILLUSTRATED HISTORY' CHRIS WELCH *(Voyageur Books)*



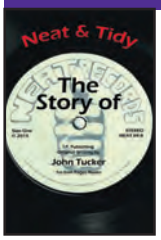
Written by Chris Welch, who joined the Melody Maker team in 1964, this book aspires to be the ultimate illustrated history of Eric Clapton. In terms of the wide range of photographs that span the entire career of Clapton, this may well be a true assertion. Supporting this claim, I looked for all the iconic photos such as the "Beano album", the "Clapton Is God" one and Cream at the Albert Hall – and they were all there! The book also contains a fair amount of text and provides a medium-length biography which gets the main points across, but does not venture into endless detail.

Also to note, the book focuses on the earlier part of Clapton's career, so two hundred of the book's two hundred and fifty-six pages take the reader up to 1983; allowing a brisk but pleasant journey to the present day. The upside (of course) is that the early bands such as Yardbirds and Cream are covered in all their glory and the selected photos are large and, on the whole, in vivid technicolour. Highlights for me are the photos of Cream rowing in a lake in Central Park and Clapton hanging out with John Lennon and Yoko Ono.

Album covers are a key ingredient in the book and the iconic ones (just checked that I've only used this word twice so far) are smattered throughout and also in the useful and complete discography of Clapton (with bands and solo).

Overall, this is an attractive, large and colourful book by Welch, who was on the music scene in the mid-Sixties when Clapton's career started in earnest.

'NEAT & TIDY : THE STORY OF NEAT RECORDS' JOHN TUCKER *(Iron Pages Books)*



John Tucker has written what is surely the definitive story of Neat Records (which stands in history as one of the key independent labels underpinning the New Wave Of British Heavy Metal). Most famous in its stable was The Tygers Of Pan Tang, but in terms of legendary and cult status there was also Venom, Raven and Jaguar.

The story is more "Bad News Tour" than "Spinal Tap" and by the way that's a loving statement; the photos of these early 1980's bands take you straight back to the glory days of Kerrang!, denim jackets with a few sewn-on Motörhead and Iron Maiden patches etc.

One of the interesting facts from this comprehensive three hundred and fifty page tome is that the owner of Neat Records (David Wood) also owned a recording studio; and, in fact, the studio was the driving force behind the label's output. It is no wonder that the label was singles-based with a plethora of bands (some successful, some less so) recording at the studio. The corollary of this approach is that the label would ultimately decline as it didn't back and nurture a smaller number of bands and therefore assist building long-term album-based careers.

Any fans of the bands in the Neat Records stable will gulp the contents of this book down; there are a multitude of quotes from people and from the bands, most looking back with fondness at this bygone age.

The big "so what" of this label (and the genre) is that a number of young Americans were lapping up these very British Heavy Metal releases and in no small way, they inspired them to form bands such as Metallica, Megadeth and the like.

This book is an essential addition to the story of NWOBHM.

'THE EAGLES FAQ' ANDREW VAUGHAN *(Backbeat Books)*

Subtitled 'All That's Left To Know About Classic Rock's Superstars' – I would say that is a fair statement. The book, part of the vast FAQ series, is three hundred and twenty-eight pages long and covers the entire history of the band. As a bonus, the pre-Eagles biography of each of the band's members is included as well as sections on the "Fifth Eagles" (there are two of them so please read the book to see who they are). The book also covers the solo careers of the band members (Don Henley being the most successful but of course Glenn Frey had a feisty hit making period and became an actor for a while – see him in 'Miami Vice' and 'Jerry Maguire').

The making of and the concepts behind 'Hotel California' naturally forms centre stage in the book; originally developed by Don Felder, it was called "The Mexican Reggae Song" by the band (and on reflection that is a pretty good description). The lyrics have been universally discussed and these are covered in the book; theories include it being a dissertation of a disaffected 1970's America and also that it is about a church of Satanists – take your pick!

A fair bit of personal details are included, Stevie Nicks pops up in a few places and the various marriages plus divorces are covered but more superficially. The return of the Eagles (once hell indeed did freeze over) does not end the book – as there was life in them yet! The book then covers the bold decision to sell their 'Long Road Out Of Eden' album exclusively in Wal-Mart which was a move which still resulted in a #1 Album nevertheless.

The book closes with a high level chronology detailing how the band is still active and valid to this day – a Grammy in 2008 and touring to the present day (please note, The Eagles do not approve of Smartphone videoing of their concerts).

'THE PRS ELECTRIC GUITAR BOOK' DAVE BURRLUCK *(Backbeat Books)*

Part of the Backbeat series about the electric guitars used in the Rock world, this book is about the much loved PRS (named after its founder Paul Reed Smith). Hailed as the greatest living guitar maker, Smith started his guitar brand tracking down guitar heroes and making guitars for them. So, at an early age, he had the likes of Carlos Santana, Peter Frampton and Ted Nugent playing and respecting the build quality of his guitars. The book, in glossy colour from the start, shows clippings of the young Smith's foray into the Rock world and tells of the long trek from making single guitars to forming the PRS Company and making it a globally known brand.

As for the guitars themselves, the book is a shrine to the attractive PRS designs; some would say the PRS is the sweet spot between the Gibson Les Paul and the Fender Stratocaster with the best of both worlds. What I would say is that the colours, designs and wood-grain of the PRS stand out and it is no wonder they are played by an ever-growing list of luminaries such as Al Di Meola, Neal Schon, Mark Tremonti and Marty Friedman (quite a broad musical range to boot). The book ends with detailed specifications of the PRS range in its thirty year history to date.

The highlight of the book, for me, is the focus on the use of dragon imagery on the body of the guitars and inlays in the neck; the red Dragon 2000 has to be seen to be believed (only fifty were made) and the high res photographs on the high gloss paper used in the book does it proud.

'THE RECORDING SECRETS BEHIND 50 GREAT ALBUMS' KYLEE SWENSON GORDON *(Backbeat Books)*

This book is a compilation of interviews (originally published in Electronic Musician, Remix and EQ magazines) edited by Kylee Swenson Gordon covering fifty albums from the full spectrum of music. Rock is, of course, included and accounts for a good quarter of the book; this shouldn't take away from the rest of it as, for example, the Dr Dre and OutKast articles are interesting even to the casual reader.

As for the Rock acts, it is probably no surprise that Fleetwood Mac's 'Rumours' is covered by an interview with engineer Richard Dashut. Of course this is a "muso" book, so there is lots of talk about analogue tape oxidising and stuff like that rather than the usual stories about the band members' social lives. The book concentrates on the music and how it was recorded; it is essentially a primer on how to make a "great" album.

Producer Jack Douglas and engineer Jay Messina talk about the making of Aerosmith's 'Toys In The Attic' and 'Rocks'. Again, the music-making details are paramount so the location of Joey Kramer's drums is discussed as well as the fact that 'Toys' was recorded on only fifteen tracks – which is pretty astonishing by today's standards.

This, along with the other articles, gives a coal-face recollection of music-magic happening. Other notable acts covered are Pink Floyd (with coverage of the 'Piper At The Gates Of Dawn' album), The Doors and The Who. Pete Townshend gives a detailed account of his recording methods, software and use of keyboards.

This book will be extremely interesting to budding musicians, engineers etc. but there is enough music history contained within for the general music lover.

'WHO INVENTED HEAVY METAL?' MARTIN POPOFF *(Power Chord Press)*

This is a question that crops up from time to time and one that Martin Popoff (PhD of Rock) has structured a book around. He tackles it by defining what Heavy Metal is, where it came from (essentially Rock 'n' Roll, Power Blues etc.) and puts some ground rules on how he determines who merits the accolade of the inventor of Heavy Metal. I won't spoil the read by announcing which band it is!

In tackling the answer to the title of the book, Popoff actually goes back to the roots of popular music and takes us through the twentieth century and highlights all the important steps in the evolution of Metal. To be honest, he takes it to extremes and starts back to biblical times to make the point that loud music has been around pre-Lemmy Kilmister! As a result, the book is a useful primer on Rock 'n' Roll, R&B, British Invasion bands etc. It also gives interesting facts on some of the contenders for the first Metal band including the American contenders Blue Cheer and Iron Butterfly and the British ones such as Cream, Uriah Heep, Deep Purple, Black Sabbath etc.

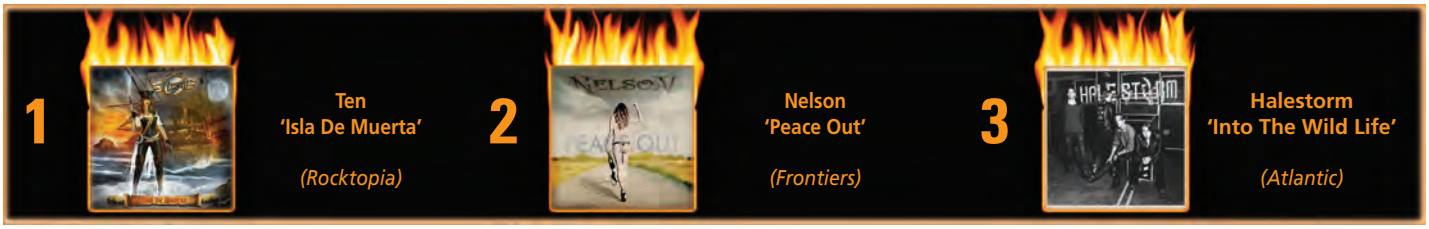
Of note, the Hammond Organ is seen as influential in the original Heavy Metal sound and so, of course, Jon Lord and Ken Hensley are given plenty of mentions. In the text, I was also reminded of the line-up of Chas Hodges (from Chas 'n' Dave) and Ritchie Blackmore in the Outlaws. The beauty of this book is it covers so much ground, and leads the reader to a reasoned conclusion on the subject matter. There are a few illustrations to break things up a bit – mainly being key album covers and band adverts containing early references to them being heavy or simply being quite charming with their early 1970's marketing approach.

So without giving the game away, I (on the whole) agree with the answer from Popoff and feel more generally informed about the roots of Metal.

FOR MORE REVIEWS OF ALBUMS, DVDS CONCERTS AND MORE, VISIT WWW.ROCKTOPIA.CO.UK

PLAYLISTS

Ant Heeks compiles our writers' picks for this issue, where the 'Isla De Muerta' album sees one of the U.K.'s finest take the top spot – Ten to One!



Bruce Mee

1. **Ten** – Isla De Muerta
2. **Dennis Churchill Dries** – I
3. **Rage** – Run For The Night
4. **Anti Flag** – American Spring
5. **Kelly Keeling** – Mind Radio

Dave Scott

1. **Kamelot** – Haven

2. **Temperance** – Limitless
3. **Powerwolf** – Blessed And Possessed
4. **Jaded Star** – Memories From The Future
5. **Dendera** – Pillars Of Creation

James Gaden

1. **Michael Des Barres** – The Key To The Universe
2. **Lulu** – Making Life Rhyme
3. **Whitesnake** – The Purple Album
4. **The Dead Daisies** – Revelución
5. **Wilson Hawk** – The Road

Steven Reid

1. **Kamelot** – Haven
2. **Blackberry Smoke** – Wood, Wire & Roses
3. **Ten** – Isla De Muerta
4. **Karnataka** – Secrets Of Angels
5. **State Urge** – Confrontation

Ant Heeks

1. **Ten** – Isla De Muerta
2. **House Of Lords** – Indestructible

3. **Halestorm** – Into The Wild Life
4. **Nightwish** – Endless Forms Most Beautiful
5. **Trixter** – Human Era

Rob McKenzie

1. **Impellitteri** – Venom
2. **Whitesnake** – The Purple Album
3. **Daylight Robbery** – Falling Back To Earth
4. **Kasim Sulton** – 3
5. **Graham Bonnet** – Private i

Ian Johnson

1. **Symphony X** – Underworld
2. **Lotta Lene** – Smoke & Mirrors
3. **Borealis** – Purgatory
4. **Trixter** – Human Era
5. **House Of Lords** – Indestructible

Dave Bott

1. **Ten** – Isla De Muerta
2. **Halestorm** – Into The Wild Life
3. **Lunden Reign** – American Stranger
4. **Torch** – The Music Remembers Jimi Jamison & Fergie Frederiksen
5. **Jaded Star** – Memories From The Future

Mónica Castedo-López

1. **Nelson** – Peace Out
2. **Dan Patlansky** – Dear Silence Thieves
3. **Beauvoir/Free** – American Trash
4. **House Of Lords** – Indestructible
5. **Dave Martone** – Nacimiento

Ray Paul

1. **Brian Wilson** – No Pier Pressure
2. **Jethro Tull** – Minstrel In The Gallery 40th Anniversary Edition
3. **Shawn James & The Shapeshifters** – The Gospel According To Shawn James And The Shapeshifters
4. **Four Star Revival** – Knights Of The Revival
5. **Toto** – XIV

Gary Marshall

1. **Toto** – XIV

2. **Nelson** – Peace Out
3. **IZZ** – Everlasting Instant
4. **Steve Hughes** – Tales From The Silent Ocean
5. **Kamelot** – Haven

Duncan Jamieson

1. **Trixter** – Human Era
2. **Nelson** – Peace Out
3. **Jared James Nichols** – Old Glory And The Wild Revival
4. **Michael Bormann** – Closer
5. **Romeo's Daughter** – Spin

Dave Cockett

1. **Symphony X** – Underworld
2. **Kamelot** – Haven
3. **Darkology** – Fated To Burn
4. **House Of Lords** – Indestructible
5. **Within Silence** – Gallery Of Life

Carl Buxton

1. **Nightwish** – Endless Forms Most Beautiful
2. **Helloween** – My God Given Right
3. **Armored Saint** – Win Hands Down
4. **Mark Slaughter** – Reflections In A Rear View Mirror
5. **Ten** – Isla De Muerta

Az Chaudhry

1. **Halestorm** – Into The Wild Life
2. **FM** – Heroes And Villains

3. **Radioactive** – F4UR
4. **Sweet Lynch** – Only To Rise
5. **Eclipse** – Armageddonize

Mark Donnelly

1. **Wallenberg's Whiskey Hell** – Bullets 'n' Burritos
2. **Jessica's Theme Band** – Matter Of Time
3. **Radioactive** – Four
4. **Survivor** – Vital Signs
5. **Torch** – The Music Remembers Jimi Jamison & Fergie Frederiksen

Alexandra Mrozowska

1. **Whitesnake** – The Purple Album
2. **Peterik/Scherer** – Risk Everything
3. **Bonfire** – Glorious
4. **Michael Bormann** – Closer
5. **Reload** – Hotter Than A Bullet

Sophie Brownlee

1. **Halestorm** – Into The Wild Life
2. **Danger** – Danger
3. **Hardcore Superstar** – HCSS
4. **Hozier** – Hozier
5. **Razzmattazz** – Sons Of Guns

Brent Rusche

1. **Beauvoir/Free** – American Trash
2. **Nelson** – Peace Out
3. **House Of Lords** – Indestructible
4. **Trixter** – Human Era
5. **Biters** – Electric Blood

Woody

1. **Ten** – Isla De Muerta
2. **Beauvoir/Free** – American Trash
3. **Trixter** – Human Era
4. **Romeo's Daughter** – Spin
5. **Lotta Lene** – Smoke And Mirrors

Dave Crompton

1. **Ten** – Isla De Muerta
2. **Serpentine** – Circle Of Knives
3. **Nelson** – Peace, Out

4. **Iconic Eye** – Hidden In Plain Sight
5. **Kamelot** – Haven

Helen Bradley Owers

1. **Stone Cold Killers** – Isolated Hell
2. **David Bowie** – Aladdin Sane
3. **Uriah Heep** – Abominog
4. **Toseland** – Hearts And Bones
5. **Beth Hart** – Better Than Home

Steve Swift

1. **Palace Of The King** – White Bird/Burn the Sky
2. **Paul Weller** – As Is Now
3. **House Of Lords** – Indestructible
4. **Tony Mills** – Over My Dead Body
5. **Jared James Nicholas** – Old Glory – Wild Revival

Ian Parry

1. **Tysondog** – Cry Havoc
2. **FM** – Heroes And Villains

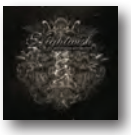
3. **Breaking Waves** – Move a Mountain
4. **The Darkness** – Last Of Our Kind
5. **Twisted Sister** – Live At The Astoria

Mick Burgess

1. **Funkadelic** – O2 Academy, Newcastle 2015
2. **Radioactive** – F4UR
3. **Nightwish** – Endless Forms Most Beautiful
4. **The Dictators** – Go Girl Crazy
5. **SOTO** – Inside The Vertigo

Mike Ainscoe

1. **Leprous** – The Congregation
2. **Toto** – XIV
3. **Nightwish** – Endless Forms Most Beautiful



4. **The Vintage Caravan** – Arrival
5. **UFO** – Strangers In The Night

Michael Anthony

1. **Vertica** – The Haunted South
2. **Luna Rossa** – Secrets And Lies
3. **Woodbridge** – The Fire Inside
4. **Steve Rothery** – The Ghosts Of Pripyat
5. **The Tangent** – A Spark In The Aether

Bruce E.J. Atkinson

1. **The Answer** – Raise A Little Hell
2. **Nightmare World** – In The Fullness Of Time
3. **The Riptide Movement** – Getting Through
4. **Thunder** – Wonder Days
5. **Cain's Offering** – Stormcrow

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RAGE OF ANGELS (UK) DEGREED (SWE)

COLDSPELL (SWE) AT VANCE (GER) JOHNNY LIMA (US)

DEVIL´S TRAIN (GER) SHOTGUN (SWE) GRAND DESIGN (SWE)

HOUSE OF SHAKIRA (SWE) BARBE-Q-BARBIES (FIN)

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Upplands Väsby kommun

BANDIT ROCK

BANDIT CLASSICS

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FRONTIERS ROCK FESTIVAL II

LIVE CLUB, MILAN, TREZZO SULL'ADDA: LIVE MUSIC CLUB – 11-12 APRIL 2015

This was the second instalment of Italian record label Frontiers' own festival and this year it had been scaled down to two full days from last year's ambitious three day event, but for VIP package buyers and special guests there was still a warm-up acoustic night in the hotel of choice. This comprised of an eight song set by Eclipse trio Erik Mårtensson, Magnus Henrikssen and Magnus Ulfstedt which began well enough with a great 'Unbreakable', but continued with the guitarists not quite in tune with each other and discordant versions of 'To Mend A Broken Heart' and 'Bleed & Scream', amongst others. It was all in good fun and the band joked their way through it. In contrast FM were note perfect and stunned the crowd, many of whom have never seen them before, their new record label included. Steve Overland was his usual sublime self and the band were in good spirits as they mixed it up with 'Story Of My Life', 'Closer To Heaven', 'Blood And Gasoline', 'That Girl' and 'Hollow'; they finished with a sing-along of Joe Walsh's 'Rocky Mountain Way'.

Next up were members of the Italian in-house band, Alessandro Del Vecchio and Mario Percudani, who performed songs Del Vecchio had written for projects like Find Me and Revolution Saints, unusually with keyboard player and singer Del Vecchio on acoustic guitar for the first part of their set. The duo were joined by Anna Portalupi on bass as Del Vecchio switched to keyboards for a heartfelt version of RS' 'In The Name Of The Father', which was dedicated to label boss Serafino Perugino's Dad, before they were joined by Ted Poley for Danger Danger's 'Don't Walk Away' and 'Feels Like Love'. The fun continued as Harem Scarem's Harry Hess and Darren Smith took to the stage for versions of 'Hard To Love' and 'Distant Memory' before everyone bar FM crammed onto the tiny stage, with the chaotic but fun 'Don't Stop Believing' that brought the night's musical entertainment to a close.

11 April 2015

The following day started respectably well after noon at the pleasant Live Club, a decent music venue with a big stage, a VIP balcony, an outside area to soak up the sun between bands and enough space to fit over a thousand Melodic Rockers, even if there were only around half that for most of the day. The opening act was The Murder Of My Sweet singer **ANGELICA RYLIN**, who performed songs from last year's impressive solo album, 'Thrive', with a band that featured not only the omnipresent Del Vecchio on keys, but TMOMS/Mind's Eye drummer Daniel Flores too. Having seen her before, I already knew that the Swedish chanteuse had a great live voice and a good stage presence, but despite an obvious lack of rehearsal time, it was a great job done by all concerned, from the opening salvo of the Harry Hess co-write 'Breaking My Heart', the thumping 'I'm Strong' and the killer ballad 'Can't Stop Love', to the lively ending of 'This Kiss Is For You' and an excellent 'Take Me To Your Heart'. Rylin and the boys may not have re-invented the wheel but the songs were well written, her guitar player had a good sense of melody and the other instruments made all the right sounds in the right places; a very good start to the full event.

Following what was essentially a new act, NWOBHM stalwarts **PRAYING MANTIS** were old hands at this festival lark and delivered a short and snappy six song set that had the most recognised of their older songs at either end. They hit the crowd between the eyes with 'Captured City' and then sailed back into it from the new track 'Believable' for the big ending. Fielding two new members alongside founding brothers Tino and Chris Troy and guitarist Andy Burgess, singer John Cuijpers made as good an account of himself on the older songs like 'Captured…' and 'Panic In The Streets' as he did on the new stormer 'Fight For Your Honour', but it was the more melodic 'Dream On' that was my highlight of their brief set.

If there's one band that are sure to rip things up at a festival it's **ECLIPSE**, their recent increase in live dates turning them into a well-oiled machine with former drummer Magnus Ulfstedt now firmly established as the band's bass player. Their set was fast-paced and energetic; Erik Mårtensson covered every inch of the stage as he waved his mic stand around and revelled in the freedom of no longer playing a rhythm guitar. Magnus Henrikssen made some difficult riffs and solos look effortless and drummer Robban Bäck flailed around in his oversized t-shirt. 'I Don't Want To Say I'm Sorry', 'Wake Me Up' and 'The Storm' were instant Melodic Hard Rock crowd pleasers, the Celtic strains of 'Battlegrounds' and the tuneful 'S.O.S.' mixed things up a bit, and the all-too-short set ended with the breathtaking 'Bleed & Scream' and 'Breaking My Heart Again'. There are times when maybe the backing tracks were a little too loud, but there was no denying that Eclipse have carved a niche for themselves and know how to put on a show.

Doug Aldrich's decision to leave Whitesnake had certainly come as a big surprise, but every cloud has a silver lining and here he was with singer Keith St. John in the rejuvenated **BURNING RAIN**, with ex-Quiet Riot/Dokken bassist Sean McNabb and current Mr Big drummer Matt Starr in tow. As good as these guys were, I found that the BR originals like 'The Cure', 'My Lust, Your Fate' and 'Heaven Goes By Me' didn't really hold my attention, and things were not helped when Aldrich had guitar problems, the space filled by an impromptu bass solo by the much underrated McNabb. St. John was very Robert Plant in look and style and he imbued songs that didn't really have big enough hooks with at least some soul and groove, but the muted crowd reaction certainly got better when they covered Aldrich's own Whitesnake co-write 'Steal Your Heart Away' and followed it with 'Fool For Your Loving'. As much as it's wise to give a crowd something they know, I was a little non-plussed by further covers of the Montrose classic 'Rock The Nation' and Led Zeppelin's 'Kashmir', although with the help of Del Vecchio on keys the latter was probably the highlight of their set.

There was certainly a buzz about perennial British faves **FM**, they had never played in Italy before this trip and word had spread about how good they were in the hotel the previous night. Greeted like returning heroes, the band put in an eleven song set of early classics with a handful of post-reunion songs that blended in seamlessly. They hit the ground running with the snappy 'Tough Love' where Overland created a sea of open-mouthed admiration as he matched the studio versions of 'I Belong To The Night', 'Closer To Heaven', 'Let Love Be The Leader' and 'That Girl', with the brand new 'Digging Up The Dirt' thrown in for good measure. The band grinned from ear to ear at the reception to 'Bad Luck', 'Tough It Out' and 'Burning My Heart Down', Jim Fitzpatrick showed how he has made the lead guitarist's role his own and Merv Goldsworthy flashed that cheeky grin every time the crowd sang louder. Having seen the band countless times and never been disappointed, it felt like I had watched my own team win a prestigious game away from home – not something that us Wigan fans have seen that much recently!

Unusually the Pete Lesperance-less **HAREM SCAREM** were above FM on the bill, the guitarist had broken his arm just before rehearsals were due to start. Rather than cancel, singer Harry Hess, drummer Darren Smith and bassist Stan Miczek recruited Michale Vassos from fellow Torontonians Honor First, who not only did a sterling job, but also added little bits of his own style to Lesperance's trademark solos. They kicked off with 'Garden Of Eden' from the new 'Thirteen' album and followed it up with the sinister 'Dagger'. I started to wonder if Hess' promise to play plenty of songs from the first two albums had just been his usual wicked sense of humour. However, he was true to his word and

they mixed in the new 'Troubled Times' amongst a run that included 'Hard To Love', 'Slowly Slipping Away', 'Distant Memory' and a full band version of 'Honestly', before Smith took over the mic for 'Sentimental Blvd'. 'Saviours Never Cry' and 'Stranger Than Love' were the prelude to another trio of new songs, each translated well to the live show before 'Karma Cleansing' seemingly brought the set to an end. Thankfully, the band were brought back for 'Change Comes Around' and 'No Justice', Hess sang better than I've ever heard him before and HS left the crowd content with the mixture of material.

There had been a bit of controversy back in Blighty about **JOE LYNN TURNER** cancelling the last two shows of his U.K. tour to get his voice right for this one. Unfortunately for Turner and his Italian fans, his chest infection failed to improve sufficiently to make his set enjoyable, but kudos to him for making it to the end of the set when it was clear he wasn't well. Backed by the talented and very tall guys from Swedish band Dynazty (perhaps not one of somebody's better ideas to put Turner between two such giants?), the band were very good indeed and helped Turner as much as they could with their effective backing vocals, but there were times when he was so hoarse and in pain that you had to feel for the guy. The set-list was a bit controversial too, especially as this was a partisan Melodic Rock crowd who would have known songs from his solo career or Sunstorm (mostly on Frontiers). For some reason he chose, alongside his Rainbow hits like 'Death Alley Driver', 'I Surrender', 'Stone Cold', 'Street Of Dreams' and 'Spotlight Kid', to play Deep Purple, Rainbow and Yngwie Malmsteen songs that he had no input in; 'Perfect Strangers', 'Burn', 'Long Live Rock 'N Roll', 'Man On A Silver Mountain' and 'Rising Force' for instance. A painful 'Smoke On The Water' brought day one to a close in front of less people than had been around at the start of his set.

12 April 2015

The Nigel Bailey-fronted Three Lions had been a popular choice as the opener of last year's festival, so it made a lot of sense to bring the man himself back to open day two to play songs from 'Long Way Down', the recent album released under his surname. The crowd appeared quite sparse as **BAILEY** made their entrance, but the ones who were there made plenty of noise during 'Long Way Down' and the raunchy 'Bad Reputation'. The band quickly settled into their surroundings and visibly grew in confidence. Their short set of just six songs was highlighted by the sensible inclusion of Three Lions' most popular song 'Trouble In A Red Dress', with the amazing closer 'In The Name Of The King' which showed Bailey's rich voice and easy stage manner. There will be plenty more to come from the man and his band, of that I'm sure.

Like Eclipse, **VEGA** have been playing regularly for the last couple of years and have come on in leaps and bounds as a live band, they no longer rely on the irrepressible Nick Workman to provide the sole visual focus with guitarist Marcus Thursten and bassist Tom Martin now moving around more than before too. They opened with 'Kiss Of Life' and the set that followed was a trip through the more upbeat parts of their three albums, with highlights that included 'White Knuckle Ride', 'What The Hell', 'Stereo Messiah' and the brilliant 'Into The Wild'. 'All Or Nothing' and the effective 'Hands In The Air' cemented probably the best Vega performance I have seen so far and they certainly seemed to have made an impression on this crowd.

TED POLEY was here last year with Danger Danger and has been recording a new solo album with Del Vecchio, so a solo set, backed by the Italian house band, was quite a tasty prospect. Things kicked off with a lively 'Beat The Bullet', Poley entertained as he grinned and cajoled his way through a show consisting mostly of D2 tunes, with the notable exceptions of the Bone Machine Rocker 'Man Alive' and the solo song 'Going Blind' from the 'Smile' album. 'Under The Gun' had some great guitar parts that were handled superbly by Percudani and Poley even went for his traditional walkabout during 'Don't Walk Away'. After 'Feels Like Love' was played for the second time this weekend, 'Bang Bang' was greeted like the AOR classic that it is. The arrival of Norwegian singer Issa turned 'One Step From Paradise' into an impressive duet before the traditional closer 'Naughty Naughty' – with a killer bass line by Portalupi – brought to a close forty-five minutes that had flown by like ten.

Germany's **PINK CREAM 69** are another comfortable festival band with eleven studio albums to draw material from. They started with the killer 'Keep Your Eye On The Twisted' and continued through a set that crammed no less than thirteen songs into their fifty minutes. Led by celebrated producer and song-writer Dennis Ward, they were super tight with skilled riffs and solos from guitarists Alfred Koffler and Uwe Reitenauer and a powerful beat from new drummer Chris Schmidt, but it was Burnley's finest, David Readman, who raised the quality another couple of notches with the rich vocals and confident stage moves of a young David Coverdale. 'Lost In Illusions' was particularly good, as was 'Do You Like It Like That', but Melodic Hard Rock doesn't get any better than 'Living My Life For You' and the monumental 'Shame'. As with Vega, it was one of the best sets I had ever seen them play.

There's been a lot of controversy recently about the backing tracks that bands play along to, and whilst I'm fine with bands who use a small amount for keys and backing vocals, **HOUSE OF LORDS** are one of the many bands who I think rely on them far too much. A majority of the time it works, but I've also seen them when it goes spectacularly wrong. Anyhow, they write great songs and they went down a storm. They opened with the classic 'Sahara' and slipped in oldies like 'Love Don't Lie', 'Can't Find My Way Home' and 'I Wanna Be Loved' alongside recent songs like 'Big Money' and 'Cartesian Dreams'. Jimi Bell was a fiery shred guitarist and Chris McCarvill was a decent singer and a great bass player, but there was no doubting that it was James Christian's band and that he was a truly great front-man with a nice line in epic lyrics. Maybe if they brought a singing keyboard player with them, I would have enjoyed it more, particularly when those keys were the main focus of the band, as was the case on the closing 'Pleasure Palace'.

The first thing that struck me as odd about **LYNCH MOB** was that George Lynch was playing a Les Paul, which didn't really look right to me. However, 'She's Evil But She's Mine' and 'River Of Love' were great opening numbers, although Lynch and his drummer were initially so loud that Oni Logan's vocals were quite indistinct. Currently on their ninth drummer and seventh bass player (Burning Rain's McNabb filled in here), Lynch and Logan are, of course, original members, although there have also been six other singers between Logan's many brief spells in the band. The set dipped badly with a few latter day Mob songs before they give the crowd exactly what they want with Dokken's 'Into The Fire', 'Alone Again', 'Tooth & Nail' and 'Mr Scary'. They closed the patchy set to a sea of frantic Dad-dancing with their own 'Wicked Sensation'.

Although I initially liked them, I have been a bit lukewarm to Jim Peterik's last few albums with **PRIDE OF LIONS**, finding them a bit bland and samey, but here they were excellent, even sensational in parts. Whilst Peterik's bizarre outfit was an assault on the eyes, the upbeat 'It's Criminal' grabbed everyone by the ears, with perfect sound, flawless musicianship and Toby Hitchcock's superb vocals. 'Unbreakable' and the cheesy 'Music And Me' were other milestones of the early part of the set; in particular the "goose-bump" moments that were every time guitarist Mike Aquino took a solo and Christian Cullen's sublime keyboard work. However, things went to a whole other level when Peterik made a speech about his friend Jimi Jamison and the band Rocked through the Survivor classics 'High On You', 'Oceans', 'Man Against The World' and an awesome 'I Can't Hold Back'; they all showed just how good Hitchcock was, easily the best singer at this festival, bar none. Hitchcock got a rest as Peterik introduced Marc Scherer and he sang two songs from their recent collaboration; 'Risk Everything' and 'Cold Blooded'. To be honest, I didn't really care for his voice, so it was a relief when Hitchcock returned for 'Born To Believe In You', 'Gone' and 'Heaven On Earth'. An inevitable encore was called for and the band obliged with 'The Courage To Love Somebody' and an obvious 'Eye Of The Tiger', albeit with a different arrangement that didn't really seal the night in the way that it should have.

Despite the scaling down and a couple of late changes to the line-up, the second Frontiers Rock Festival was almost as enjoyable as the first. There were several great performances, a nice venue, great weather, and lots of good conversation, so overall it got a big tick from me!

Phil Ashcroft

FIRIN' ON ALL SIX!

THE ALAN PARSONS PROJECT
London: O2 Shepherd's Bush Empire
18 March 2015

Every so often, amongst the many shows I attend, you get your socks knocked off by a particular band. Tonight that band was The Alan Parsons Project, with their first U.K. show in ten years.

Positioned centre stage, almost like a conductor, was the man himself, surrounded by some of the best musicians in the business. Opening number 'I Robot' was an instrumental piece which had rich keyboard work that set the tone for the rest of the evening. The set was basically a "greatest hits" collection with some much loved, deeper cuts thrown into the mix which included such selections as 'Time' and 'Don't Answer Me'.

Aside from Alan Parsons, the vocal work was shared between guitarists Alistair Green and Dan Tracey, saxophonist Todd Cooper and the quite exceptional P.J. Olsson. The latter's work on the concept piece 'Turn Of A Friendly Card' and the truly beautiful 'When I'm Old And Wise' was breathtaking. I would rate the overall vocal work as some of the best this reviewer has ever heard in the live arena.

By far the most well known song in the bands repertoire was 'Eye In The Sky', though 'Sirius' was also be familiar to some; it was an instrumental piece that was used in countless U.S. sporting events and TV shows. This all but brought the show to a close before the encores of 'Dr. Tarr And Professor Fether' and 'Games People Play' concluded the evening.

Hopefully after the success of this show, it won't be another ten years before we see these guys on our shores again.

Ray Paul

SMASH INTO PIECES
Nottingham: The Doghouse
21 March 2015

The last time Smash Into Pieces were in town was to support fellow Swedes Amaranthe at Rock City. It would probably have been better to have supported them again as they were playing Rock City at the same time as this poorly attended gig was taking place.

Who on earth booked a gig here? It's a pub two miles out of Nottingham City Centre with a bar for the locals and a small gig room at the back; there couldn't have been more than twenty people who attended. I completely understand bands wanting to go out on tour on their own, but the venues booked for the U.K. tour (I can't speak for the other European venues) had really sold the band short. They played a couple of nights previously in Bannerman's in Edinburgh when surely a gig booked in Glasgow would have been a far smarter move.

SIP sophomore album 'The Apocalypse DJ' is something of a tour-de-force of edgy Modern Rock with a "million dollar" production and the band reproduced that tonight and sounded excellent. That said, there was more than a suspicion that vocalist Chris Adam Hedman mimed his way through the night, perhaps it was a bid to save his voice for the long tour ahead.

'Stronger' opened the proceedings and there was a good choice of songs from the new album which included rousing versions of 'Disaster Highway', 'Bullets' , the Alter Bridge sounding 'Don't Wake Me' and 'Cocaine' featuring Hedman only on vocals (obviously without Elize Ryd who was hammering out her thing at Rock City). Even in the absence of lead guitarist Benjamin Jennebo, the sound was pin-sharp and Per Bergquist filled in remarkably well with the solos. The band delved into the debut album to good effect and belted out excellent versions of 'Colder', 'Heroes' and 'A Friend Like You'. Saving the best for last, we got yet another version of 'Cocaine', this time it actually featured Ryd who I assumed had managed to get herself a taxi from Rock City up to this venue for a timely encore, and something of an audience request for 'Unbreakable' which saw the crowd (more a small collection of people) go wild.

It appeared that Hedman indeed actually sung the two encore songs, which begged the question why mime when you have a decent enough voice to carry it off properly. Throughout the rest of the set, the vocalist showed no strain, held the mic miles away from his mouth and the sound coming from the speakers was way too perfect. Come on guys! We're not stupid and it's cheating; if you're serious about increasing your popularity and spreading the word then you're not going to get very far with this little facade.

This was an enjoyable but a hugely flawed gig.

Mike Newdeck

DANNY VAUGHN AND DAN REED
Newcastle: The Cluny
02 April 2015

Back in the days before Grunge, Danny Vaughn and Dan Reed stood poised with the Rock world at their feet; Vaughn fronting Tyketto while Reed led the Dan Reed Network. Unfortunately, seemingly overnight, the musical soundscape was changed when Nirvana's 'Smells Like Teen Spirit' broke big time. Talent, however, does not fade away. Vaughn continued performing with his own band and as an acoustic artist, whereas Reed went on a soul searching voyage of discovery before finally re-emerging in 2010 with his acoustic 'Coming Up For Air' album.

The pairing of Vaughn and Reed seemed such a natural fit that it made you wonder why they hadn't thought of this before. Rather than two separate sets they shared the stage for the whole evening and delivered a two-piece acoustic show of the high points of their respective careers, with a few covers chucked in for good measure.

Purely acoustic shows can sometimes drift along in a one dimensional way, but for well over two hours this show never lost its focus. That was down, in a large part, to the engaging characters of Vaughn and Reed. There was a clear "on stage camaraderie" that regularly spilled out into the crowd with jocular interaction between songs which created an atmosphere more akin to having a bunch of friends over for tea.

Those who were present in The Cluny were taken on a roller coaster of a musical journey which was fun (an impromptu run through The Monkee's 'Last Train To Clarksville'), sad ('What Dreams May Come' – Reed's particularly poignant message to the much missed Robin Williams); uplifting ('Ritual' and 'Burning Down Inside') and deadly serious where Vaughn's 'Standing Alone', a song about standing on the precipice contemplating an unthinkable way out, was sung with such feeling by Reed in the first verse and Vaughn in the second, that the emotion was almost tangible.

Reed's '99 Lashes', which told of the inhumane side of mankind, was a thought provoking protest song, the likes of which haven't been written since the 1960s. That was a major show-stopping moment and utterly compelling.

The choice of cover songs were also inspiring; Sting's 'Fields Of Gold' was excellent, whilst a rousing cover of Dio's 'Holy Diver' was a lesson in how to treat a classic with respect while stamping your own personality through it.

The big numbers, Tyketto's 'Forever Young' and Dan Reed Network's 'Get To You' proved that even when stripped of their Rock finery, these are truly great songs. If you've never heard them before, that's what YouTube is for. Check them out and see what you've been missing.

None of this would have worked had it not been for the voices. Both proved they still possess strong, melodic and emotive voices that brought the songs to life. Getting one of those on stage would have been enough but both... well that was priceless; absolutely inspiring.

Mick Burgess

UFO, REDS'COOL
Manchester: The Ritz
19 April 2015

I'm aware it might break all the laws of critique writing, so please forgive the nostalgic touch and personal tone, but there must be plenty of people who, at some point (usually later on in their lives), start to reminisce about their first love. There may have been plenty in attendance at Manchester's splendid Ritz for whom the dim and distant seventies hold memories which are similar to that of a first love, of which a large proportion will surely have held UFO close to their hearts for many a year. Going to see UFO in 2015 is akin to meeting up with her/him again after all these years and finding that they are still essentially the same. Maybe a bit wrinklier around the eyes and not quite so firm of flesh, but still pretty much the person you remember. There may have been a few changes over the years, but there's still a spark, a flickering flame which warms you ever so slightly.

In tonight's crowd, gone were the denim jackets covered with embroidery and patches of which a UFO logo would have been obligatory – they were now about as rare as the shoulder-length locks which would normally accompany the aforementioned Rock uniform. 'Strangers In The Night' and their early output has been good to them and while, over the years, they may have gone through some rough patches, the core of Phil Mogg, Andy Parker and Paul Raymond still loyally fly the flag.

Long gone too are the names of Pete Way and Michael Schenker; the latter "doing well" touring and recording with Temple Of Rock while new bassist Rob De Luca almost paid tribute to the Way legend as he modelled a low Thunderbird bass. There was also guitarist Vinnie Moore who has been doing more than a decent job "depping" in the Schenker/Paul Chapman axe role yet also providing UFO with a fresh impetus for writing and performing.

The band may stand accused of not varying their live play-list much in thirty years but when you have a bonafide classic set of songs as they do, then why not make hay while the sun continued to shine? Yes they do throw in all, or most, of what you'd expect – 'Lights Out', 'Doctor Doctor', 'Shoot, Shoot' and 'Rock Bottom' to name a few, but they were tempered with a selection from the well received new album and 'Seven Deadly' within the first half dozen numbers.

There may have also been a few dodgy outfits in the past, but the relaxed and avuncular Mogg no longer looked like he got dressed in the dark, he appeared now as a suave and a very modern man. In fact, it was quite endearing as he took a swill of beer and then returned slightly off mic to introduce the next number. Then there's Raymond who thoroughly enjoyed himself and looked nowhere near his sixty-nine years, all immaculately coiffured as he switched, as he has done for aeons, between guitar and keys. Put simply, I'll have whatever he has been having.

With UFO, there is no more the smell of anarchy like back in the late seventies when they were at the leading edge of Hard Rock. There are much more fashionable outfits who have stepped up onto the podium, yet they have endured and picked up the mantle as elder statesman and guardians of all that is good with the genre. Of course, it is always good to see old friends.

Earlier, Reds'cool – a five-piece from Russia, had lined up across the front of the stage and dispensed an entertaining forty-five minute set. Against the backdrop of the UFO Marshalls, they looked and sounded the part, almost like young nephews of the headliners; you can clearly see where their influences lie. And when you have a band with the

longevity and fortitude of UFO taking you out on tour, then why not?

Mike Ainscoe

FAHRAN
Wombwell: The Old Town Hall
21 April 2015

It was only following a Facebook post by Matt Black that I discovered that, on this particular evening, Fahran were booked to play at a pub in the centre of Wombwell on the outskirts of Barnsley. Upon arrival, there was another pleasant surprise to be discovered in that the entry was free; however, that did mean that we had Wombwell's "finest" Saturday night revellers coming in and out of the venue throughout the evening.

The "stage" was set in an alcove adjacent to the pub entrance and not elevated so I only had a limited view of the band; I did not see drummer JR Windsor and only occasionally saw guitarist Chris Byrne when he ventured to the front of the stage to solo. But on the positive side, somewhat surprisingly, the sound was very good throughout the ninety-minute set.

After Black announced, "we are not a covers band", they proceeded to play tracks from their self-titled debut album and the whole of last year's excellent 'Chasing Hours' opus. This was the third time I had seen Fahran in the last twelve months and they genuinely seemed to be getting better with every performance.

The tight rhythm section of bassist Josh Ballantyne and drummer Windsor supported the twin guitar attack of Byrne and Jake Graham (the one with the ridiculously perfect hair) and Fahran's secret weapon Black; one of the U.K.'s premier young Rock vocalists. He can really scream out the vocals with the best of them, however I believe that during this evening (and generally) it was the slower songs where he really came into his own, during the likes of the title track of the sophomore album 'Chasing Hours', 'Back To Me', 'Serenade' and my own particular favourite 'Prison'.

Listening to Fahran over the last year I have discovered that there is a hidden depth to their music underpinned with melody that is not as instantaneously obvious as many of the more straight ahead AOR bands. The latter was evident in songs like set opener 'Some Kind Of Family', 'I Heard A Joke Once', 'Cased In Steel', 'You Could Be Mine' and 'Storms We Ride'. As there was nowhere for the band to disappear to, Black announced that they would remain in-situ and they played the last three songs as an encore; 'Stay Alive', Ashes' and the brilliant 'A Thousand Nights'.

As we had not had to pay an entrance fee, I thought that it was only fitting that I purchased the physical copies of the two Fahran albums at the combined £15 discounted price; kudos to the band for keeping their merchandise to such a reasonable price.

If you get the opportunity to see this young band, at a venue near you, do yourself a favour and get down there, you will not be disappointed!

Mark Donnelly

BLUES PILLS
London: O2 Islington Academy
22 April 2015

Blues Pills are such regular visitors to these shores that by now they must know most of the audience by name! Through tonight's show in London, singer Elin Larsson suffered with some unfortunate throat issues which (I guess) was likely due to the heavy touring schedule this band keep. If I am honest, only the most finely tuned ear would have really noticed or picked up that anything was amiss vocally during the show.

From the moment they hit the stage, to the rumbling percussion of 'High Class Woman', Larsson looked like a women with an electrical charge running through her. She shook her hair, smiled at the audience and allowed that incredible voice take hold of everyone that was present.

Both bass player Zack Anderson and guitarist Dorian Sorriaux held their positions and fired out an arsenal of rumbling rhythms and soulful musical notes. Given they rarely moved from their spot, they allowed Larsson to come alive visually on the stage and she enchanted the audience, as she danced barefoot in a hypnotic world of her own.

The set-list was more or less the same as the recently released 'Blues Pills Live' album. The influence of early Fleetwood Mac was all over the beautiful 'Astralplane' while 'No Hope Left For Me' was a love song that Larsson truly sang from the heart. The band really took the roof off with ever popular 'Devil Man' before they hurtled into the cosmic jam that was 'Little Sun' that brought proceedings to an end.

The only thing missing from the show tonight was new material but with writing taking place this year, we can look forward to Blues Pills taking us further on their musical magic carpet ride.

Ray Paul

TOSELAND
Southampton: The Joiners
22 April 2015

James Toseland is determined to be taken seriously as a musician and to this end he has put together a very tight band, and it's started to pay off big time. They stormed into the set with the high octane 'Crash Landing' and the energy level was set for the night. This flowed straight into 'Coming To Get You' and you knew they really were.

What this band has in spades is personality; new drummer Joe Yoshida drew the eyes and ears with a powerhouse and stadium worthy display of technique. Ed Bamford alternated rhythm and solos with the understated Zurab Melua who is young but gave an incredibly mature performance and is surely going to become a guitarist to watch in the future. However in many ways, the stealer of the show was bassist Roger Davis; he didn't so much as own the stage as dared anyone to say otherwise. He was, without doubt, one of the most enigmatic players I've ever seen.

And that leads us to Toseland himself. He's always been aware that a Rock audience will take no bullshit from a "wannabe" former motorcycle champion. Because of this being "on trial", he has previously had a slight wariness but after two years of showing his metal, he was noticeably more relaxed and confident. He cracked jokes and engaged with the audience, many of whom it became apparent have been following the band around the country.

This was the tour's final gig and there was a decided "schools out" vibe going on, repartee was flying across the room and the audience and band became more and more connected as they sang along with songs from 'Renegade', although the new EP songs were not yet learned. Toseland took to the keyboards for 'Kingdoms' and slowed things down for a break before they sprinted down the home straight, the crescendo building until the set's final song 'Singer In A Band'. Originally this seemed more of a plea for the future but now it has a certain irony in that he has very much established himself as just that.

The crowd bayed for more and (despite not being able to leave the stage) they returned to encore with 'Gotta Be A Better Way'. The night's most interesting song was a really Rocked up version of Teardrop Explodes 1980's synth classic 'Reward'; it took a few moments to realise you knew the song but it had an arrangement that surprisingly worked really well. By this time, the sweat was flying from the band and things became decidedly manic as they went for broke with first album title track 'Renegade'.

For anyone who has not seen Toseland and feel that he is just "playing" at being a Rock star, please rest assured, he is most definitely NOT. He was absolutely the real deal and most impressively he not only has a voice, but he has a very, very good voice that really delivered live with no cop outs.

Helen Bradley Owers

SEASICK STEVE
Newcastle: O2 Academy
23 April 2015

There's something in the names of Blues artists that tell a story. Howlin' Wolf, Leadbelly, Muddy Waters and Blind Lemon Jefferson just tell of a harrowed life of toil and hardship in a way that P Diddy or 50 Cent could never do.

Seasick Steve too has had it tough, coming from a broken home and spending much of his adult life as a drifter, picking up work and food as and when he could. An early passion for music however was his gateway out and his big break came late following a call from Jools Holland just after a heart attack looked like he'd reached rock bottom.

Quite what SS would have made of all this a few years ago before his life turned around is anyone's guess. The O2 Academy was jammed full and the shows elsewhere in the country have also played out to capacity crowds. The message is loud and clear; never give up on your dreams as one day, no matter how long it takes, they might just come true.

With his rich, deep gravel hewn voice and collection of unique guitars that included his legendary cigar box and hub cap guitars, this was as far removed from the modern, over processed, plastic music that constantly blares out from MTV and "day time" radio as you could possibly get.

The reflective 'In Peaceful Dreams' shimmered with a fragile vulnerability, while at the other end of the spectrum 'Barracuda 68', with its deliciously Sleazy slide guitar, stomped and grooved and this gave wild-man drummer, the outstanding Dan Magnusson, ample room to stir things up.

With our four legged friends providing just a little inspiration for 'Swamp Dog' and 'Dog House Boogie', which featured the quite incredible Three String Trance Wonder guitar, SS proved that sometimes less is more. Who needs six strings when three sound this darned good.

Now knocking on the door of his three-quarter century mark, SS continues to work while others at his age are comfortably into their retirement. His latest album 'Sonic Soul Surfer', his seventh in just over a decade, may well be his best yet and it provided well over half a dozen of tonight's songs.

Seasick Steve seems to be making up for all those lost years and the crowd tonight benefited from his still burning enthusiasm and passion for music.

Mick Burgess

GINGER WILDHEART
Glasgow: Eastwood Theatre
29 April 2015

Ginger Wildheart has been a constant in my musical life for over twenty years now; the Wildhearts' debut – 'Earth Vs. The Wildhearts' – Rocking my world in 1994, just as their many albums have since. However, so have Silver Ginger 5, Clam Abuse, Supershit 666 and Hey Hello! alongside Ginger's many other "solo" endeavours. Hence the opportunity to hear the man himself tell tales and utter anecdotes from right across his time in, out and all about the business of music was simply too good an opportunity to miss – even if the chosen venue was in a leafy suburb of Glasgow with the feel of a community centre (time for a pre-show dip in the local swimming pool, or bite to eat in the cafe

anyone?) rather than a hotbed of drugs, debauchery and Rock 'n' Roll.

However, the comfy seats in the compact theatre proved a boon, as Wildheart regaled his enraptured audience for just under three hours of 'Songs & Words' and even then, he only left the stage after numerous nudges to wrap things up as he was already running over the venue's eleven o'clock curfew. Flanked by ex-Wolfsbane guitarist Jase Edwards (a regular co-conspirator), Wildheart strode onto the stage; both men armed with acoustic guitars and toothy grins. The latter was something that was much in evidence in the audience as tales of tractors in swimming pools, dead tramps that weren't tramps at all and visits to Thai prisons were interspersed with some sobering stories of spectacular drug and alcohol abuse.

At times Wildheart's words were almost a handbook of how not to ingratiate yourself with your record label, or indeed, how a record label should handle the career of a band utterly dripping with great songs, a great image and, seemingly, an assured future of hits and mega-stardom.

However, if the stories weren't enough on their own – and they were – then an acoustic medley of songs from the albums that were being reminisced about excited the audience even further. Oddly however, while the crowd laughed uproariously, applauded the songs enthusiastically and gasped at the ridiculousness of some of what they heard, their possible lack of "theatre experience" saw few take part in the expected sing-alongs, clapping to the music, or indeed whoop or cheer as band members past and present got a mention.

As Ginger closed the show with 'Lover It'll All Work Out' from the career saving '555%' album, he dedicated it to the evening's projectionist, who just so happened to be his long term partner, ensuring one of the loudest cheers of the whole night.

If for some ridiculous reason you haven't experienced Wildheart or his numerous projects across the past couple of decades, then you've missed out on one of the best artists of your lifetime. On this occasion Ginger's Wildheart words were amazing, but as ever, his songs were as good as you could ever hope for.

Steven Reid

ROBBEN FORD
London: O2 Islington Academy
29 April 2015

Robben Ford has received five Grammy Award nominations and was named one of the "100 Greatest Guitarists Of The 20th Century" by Musician magazine. Yet for some reason he is not a big name in the U.K., so we were treated to seeing him up close and personal in the intimate, yet packed, O2 Islington Academy.

Having just released 'Into The Sun', there were six tracks from the album interspersed with his better known tracks. With a career spanning back to the 1960s, countless albums and collaborations with George Harrison, Miles Davis etc. he had a fair few to pick from.

Ford only used two guitars in the set; there were probably better distinctions but essentially his more Soulful, Bluesy numbers were played on the Telecaster and his Rockier songs were played on a Gibson SG. As for the songs themselves, the excitement rose on the more upbeat numbers, the band were certainly tight and there were no wrong notes or miscues; this was a professional outfit doing their job.

The Blues numbers such as 'Rose Of Sharon' were exquisite; Ford's voice was crystal clear and his guitar even more so. 'Midnight Comes Too Soon' from 'A Day In Nashville' was as close to the real Blues as you could have got in midweek London.

Later in the set, Ford and his band Rocked out with 'Indianola', it had an intensely hypnotic riff, which allowed the drums to come to the fore, and a lightning fast (for the Blues) guitar solo.

Ford was a generous player that night. He allowed two bass solos, a drum solo and multiple keyboard solos and he always stood there and appreciated them.

The audience were certainly impressed with the musicianship on show although they may have appeared a bit subdued to the band at the start – however, they certainly made a noise when they asked for an encore. They got what they wanted – the slightly Funky 'Nobody's Fault But Mine', the slower paced 'Thoughtless' and the bright and breezy 'Lovin' Cup', all heavy on the guitar solo and these brought the show to its end.

Rob McKenzie

FM, ROMEO'S DAUGHTER, NO HOT ASHES
Bristol: Bierkeller
01 May 2015

Okay, I have to confess that I missed half of the No Hot Ashes set due to interviewing Leigh Matty of Romeo's Daughter, but what I caught wasn't half bad and they were certainly well received by the crowd. Visually, they looked like any other "pub covers band" you had ever seen, but the music was pretty competently delivered keyboard and guitar driven AOR that was entertaining, if nothing to write home about.

Second on the bill with FM (it helps if your hubby is in the band) were of course RD, who had returned to Bristol after some twenty-five years or so away. As has been customary since their comeback album, 'Trippin'' opened the set with its perfect mood building, siren wailing intro and they proceed to fill their thirty odd minutes with superb entertainment. Matty looked and sounded great and it was (and always is) superb to see a singer (and band) who looked like she (and they) were having a good time onstage. New album 'Spin' was carefully included, with debut single 'Touch' and future classic 'Radio' selections that encouraged punters to pick it up at the merchandise stand. The highlight for me was the always amazing 'Attracted To the Animal', although the catchy and melodic 'Bittersweet' will always be a favourite as well. Matty's shirt proudly boasted 'Born To Rock' and when you saw that huge smile on her face, it was hard to doubt.

Regardless of the quality of the support acts, the evening was always going to be about headliners FM, a band who I have never seen do a bad gig in some thirty years now. The gig hadn't sold out but the crowd was about equal to that of Joe Elliot and Down 'N' Outz's recent show, so it was good enough. Unsurprisingly, they started off with the lead track from the excellent 'Heroes & Villains' album 'Digging Up The Dirt'; this benefited from a great sound mix that had actually been spot on all evening. Whilst I wouldn't begrudge the band massive success, I loved the fact that I was still able to watch them at a smaller venue, the same one I watched them at when they toured on the back of their first album. We were all a bit older now, of course, but if I had closed my eyes during the second track 'I Belong To the Night' I would have sworn the years could have been stripped away, so good did they sound and so untouched was Steve Overland's voice after all these years.

The night's highlight came in the form of my favourite '...Villains' track 'Shape I'm In' which was simply brilliant. But as this was an FM gig, there was very little between the best and worst song as they chucked out 'Blood & Gasoline' (back in the set and very welcome), 'Bad Luck', 'Crosstown Train' and the always brilliant sing-along of 'Let Love Be The Leader'. 'Rockville's 'Story Of My Life' replaced 'Frozen Heart' in the encore, and as 'Other Side Of Midnight' finished off the ninety minute set, the venue was full of happy smiling faces. That has always been the FM effect – long may it continue.

Alan Holloway

URIAH HEEP, BLURRED VISION
Southampton: The Engine Room
06 May 2015

I arrived just in time to catch the last part of the set by the "Canadian" trio Blurred Vision. I put that in inverted commas as Sepp Osley and bassist brother Sohl are actually from Persia, the significance of which explained some of the later set. They were difficult to categorise as their influences were a jumbled mix of 1960's and 1970's "greats" all melted together into a sound that was essentially their own; albeit more Prog than anything else. They clearly had fans in the audience and it was a testament to them that the usual "outdoor" crowd were drawn inside to watch. They finished up with a strange, heavy version of Pink Floyd's 'Another Brick In The Wall' which had been altered to reflect the ongoing situation in Iran and invited the audience to chant 'Ayatollah, leave those kids alone', which they did. BV were an intriguing band and, now they are based in the U.K., one that will be worth watching I suspect.

The room started to fill and although it wasn't quite a capacity crowd, it was more than a healthy turnout for midweek. There is an air of muted anticipation and the age range was testament to the length of time Uriah Heep have been in existence. This led me to ponder the thought that, after a total of twenty-four studio albums, eighteen live albums and thirty-nine compilations, how the hell do you even begin to write your set-list? This question was answered as the band ambled on stage and headed straight in to 'Speed Of Sound' from last year's 'Outsider'. The thing that struck me straight off was you forget how wonderful it is to hear keys being an integral part of the overall band sound rather than used for fills and stabs. With music's rather amazing ability to time travel, we went back forty years with 'The Hanging Tree'. Mick Box smiled his way around the stage and clearly revelled in being in front of an audience. With a band that has been going as long as UH, it would be rare indeed not to have line-up changes. That could have been a potential problem as David Byron's quasi-Operatic vocals were an important part of the original UH sound yet over the years they have been blessed and found some extraordinary singers; Jon Sloman, Pete Goalby and now Bernie Shaw has carried that legacy through. Shaw's vocals were right on form and carried the old and the new songs with no detriment to either.

This tour was very much a celebration of the nearly fifty years Heep have been around and there were some songs that absolutely cannot be missed out so 'Sunrise' and 'Stealing' were not unexpected. 'The Magicians Birthday' turned into an extended Prog jam that wrapped itself around the room in a Psychedelic swirl. All it needed was the smell of soggy afghans and patchouli and it would have been the 1970s to perfection.

'Outsider' songs sat among the treasures and 'One Day' showed how to keep your roots without getting stuck in the past, this was a grooving, catchy Rocker as was 'Can't Take That Away', Box still knew how to write a great song.

I was hoping there would be a representation from 'Abominog' – a personal favourite album of mine – but sadly that wasn't to be, however it was made up for by the ever exquisite 'July Morning' which showcased Shaw's voice to perfection.

They finally left the stage to applause that continued long enough for them to come back for an encore. Predictably as neither song had yet appeared it was 'Gypsy' followed by 'Easy Livin'' and the two songs it would have been criminal not to do.

As the crowd happily dispersed into the night, it was in the knowledge that they have been party to some genuine retro music. I truly hope to see them out on tour again soon as I have a feeling they could start to pull in even younger audiences; there is a trend for recreating "old sound" at the moment. With Heep they don't need to recreate it... they adapted it and brought it through the ages with them.

Helen Bradley Owers

BETH HART, MILES GRAHAM
London: Barbican
08 May2015

For some reason, the Barbican was incredibly hot and airless but this failed to diminish the anticipatory buzz of the arriving audience. Opening act Irishman Miles Graham played a pared down, acoustic set with low key accompaniment from bass and Cajon; it was a nice way to relax into the evening for those who rushed here from afar or work.

I first saw Beth Hart four years ago in front of two hundred people in a little Southampton club. That gig will always be one of my Top Three and I knew then I'd never see her perform like that again; in part because I had no idea what to expect and what I got was the most magnificent voice I'd ever heard live. I will never experience that first time astonishment again, but it was glorious to see it on the faces of the Barbican audience tonight.

Hart arrived on stage alone and started the set with 'Mamma, This One's for You', a sweet and heartfelt tribute to her mother's support. Her emotive voice with the super strength vibrato is well suited to ballads but it was when the band joined her and upped

the tempo with 'Get Your Shit Together' and 'Can't Let Go' that you started to get a feel for the strength of her voice; at this point she was still only singing at half power. The set was an artful mix of light and dark, quiet and power, emotive and joyful, sadness and fun, rise and fall. This is indicative of her life and what makes Hart such an extraordinary performer, her total openness about her life. She lays her soul bare and it's completely genuine, you actually felt the audience respond to this, they were totally with her and they were unable to contain themselves as she squeezed emotion into long raw notes to which they applauded, the only way they knew to communicate their support. She dedicated 'My California' to her husband Scott and this was no showbiz dedication, this was from the heart, reinforced by his appearance on stage at the song's conclusion as he gave her a huge hug. You can't bullshit an audience, they knew this was real.

Hart is renowned as a Blues/Soul singer, but she showed her Rock credentials with her version of 'Nutbush City Limits' and 'Broken And Ugly' when she finally ramped up her voice to full-throttle, and even then, you can tell there was something left in the tank. The mic was two feet away from her and it needed to be because she is the one vocalist probably capable of blowing a full rig. She could take on some of the greatest Rock vocalists in the world and show them how it's done; she didn't so much sing from her boots as the centre of the Earth.

The set sassed up to the finale with 'The Mood That I'm In' and 'Trouble' and ended with the stunning Etta James cover 'I'd Rather Go Blind'. At this point I was feeling slightly worried that I hadn't heard the wonderful 'Mechanical Heart' but this subsided as it appeared in the encore, swiftly followed by closer 'As Long As I Have A Song'. As one, the audience rose to their feet and applauded long and loud because they knew they had just seen utter magnificence.

Beth Hart does something very few other performers do; she gives herself, heart and soul, to her audience. No emotion is taboo; love, joy, pain and fear, she is not afraid to open herself up and the audience knew and responded to this. She was and is "what you see is what you get", it is an honesty that is rare and there was genuine love in the room for her. She is undoubtedly set to become one of the great female vocalists of all time... and no-one deserves it more.

Helen Bradley Owers

HOOBASTANK, P.O.D., ALIEN ANT FARM
Bristol: Motion
14 May 2015

Still featuring no less than three out of the four original members and a career that dates back to 1994, it was clear that Alien Ant Farm has done this sort of thing before. Lead singer Dryden Mitchell is thirty-eight years old, but you still wouldn't mess with him and musically his band could teach young bands a thing or two about playing live; tonight they were tight as a camel's anus in a sandstorm with a stage presence that matched Richard Burton.

The set-list speed was break-neck and maximised the output of tunes to the full. They eased in the newbies from the latest album ('Always And Forever') with just two songs featured from it; the spiky chant-along 'Let 'Em Know' and the tuneful Punk Metal of 'Yellow Pages'. It was left to the songs from 'Anthology' to make up the bulk of the set, 'Movies', 'Sticks And Stones' and of course 'Smooth Criminal' were just three out of the six worthy of noting for their gusto, verve and crowd appreciation. The remainder of the set comprised of songs from the band's other two albums ('Truant' and 'Up In The Attic') and although it appeared many of the crowd hadn't ever heard of the likes of 'Forgive And Forget' or 'Glow', they nevertheless couldn't have failed to be impressed by this talented band who clearly loved every minute of life on stage in front of a appreciative audience. AAF may be an old dog, but from their performance tonight it was clear that they could still teach a few new dogs a trick or two.

I doubt many of those who attended tonight would have even heard of P.O.D, let alone heard any of the songs played by this Alternative Christian Metal band, but that's the beauty of live music and a three band bill. Also a product of the early nineties and with a triple platinum album ('Satellite'), P.O.D have serious credentials including six major label albums; no wonder they were good at what they do. Nu Metal with crossover appeal was the order of the day and there was plenty of forays into the early part of the bands earlier Rap Metal career with songs like 'Youth Of The Nation' (an ode to the Columbine School shootings), 'Alive' and 'Boom' (two of the band's most commercial successes) being the stand outs. P.O.D might not have been to everyone's taste this evening but they were not a disappointment.

Hoobastank may not be the band that they once were popularity wise, but they are certainly more than worth a look live and tonight proved no exception. Most of those who wished to catch them tonight were probably only familiar with their 2003 album 'The Reason' and the global hit single of the same name. Indeed a few people that I spoke to through the evening were unaware that the band had released three studio albums after this; 2012's 'Fight Or Flight' being the most recent. As expected, their material was mainly culled from the first two albums with rousing versions of 'Remember Me', 'Running Away', 'Pieces' and the fantastic 'Crawling In The Dark' from the Incubus-inspired debut. What was equally convincing were the performances of all the hits from the more commercial '...Reason' which included scorching renditions of 'Out Of Control' and the title track as an encore. Hoobastank may only be a four-piece but they made a lot of noise with Dan Estrin's cultured playing which made up for the lack of lead rhythm cover; 'This Is Gonna Hurt' from the most recent album being a particular stand out.

Unusually Hoobastank were touring without a new album to promote, but hopefully it won't be long before they're back in the studio. Judging by tonight's performance, the band are still hungry and people still want to hear them.

Mike Newdeck

ROCK GODDESS
London: O2 Islington Academy
14 May 2015

The last time this writer saw these girls tread the boards, it was supporting Y&T at the Dominion Theatre in London during 1983! I was still at school, and like most boys of my age, was quite taken with the novelty of a female Rock band; the only other I was aware of at that time was Girlschool.

Over thirty years later, the original line-up of Rock Goddess still features sisters Jody and Julie Turner on guitar/vocals and drums/vocals respectively with the bass being handled by Tracy Lamb.

Gone were the spandex trousers, bullet belts and the peroxide/raven hair. It had been replaced with a more "mature" blonde, although it no less a Rock 'n' Roll look. An audience member called out that they looked like a bunch of M.I.L.F.s midway through the set; I will leave you to work out what that means!

The set kicked off with 'Satisfied Never Crucified' from the band's debut album. Singer Jody Turner has lost none of her throaty roar and her guitar still tore chunks out of you, the rhythm section of Lamb and Julie Turner was still a powerhouse affair.

The set was basically built around the first two albums, with gems like 'Back To You' and 'To Be Betrayed' which sat nicely alongside 'You've Got Fire'. They even threw in 'Love Is A Bitch' from the much neglected third album, 'Young And Free'.

New songs 'Flying To See You' and 'Take Your Love Away' sounded promising and fitted snugly into the set. The audience was a good mixture of old-school fans sporting faded denims and young fans relishing the chance to catch these Heavy Metal legends.

The band never really had any hits, though 'Heavy Metal Rock 'N' Roll' and the awesome 'My Angel' were a Rock club staple; the audience sang their hearts out to these two selections. Maybe next time they should give 'In The Heat Of The Night' a run through too?

The only thing I can say after at the end of this evening was "welcome back girls"!

Ray Paul

TOTO
Manchester: O2 Apollo
25 May 2015

Toto's 'XIV' has been largely responsible for the U.S. AOR giant's renaissance, as proven by their biggest U.K. tour in decades. There was no support act, just two hours plus of Toto, who were not only back to four original members in guitarist Steve Lukather, keyboardists Steve Porcaro and David Paich, and bassist David Hungate, but they also featured their best surviving singer in Joseph Williams and alongside percussionist Lenny Castro, who's played on most of their albums. Country Music drum legend Shannon Forrest and backing vocalists Jenny Douglas-Foote and Mabvuto Carpenter also lent their talents to the possibly the best-sounding Toto line-up of recent years, if not ever.

A lengthy intro tape gave way to the familiar strains of the opening track from 'XIV', 'Running Out Of Time', the adrenaline flowed from the off as the curtain dropped to reveal an impressive stage set-up and brilliant lighting that pulsed in time with the music's dynamics. It had been a long-time since I had heard a live sound as perfect as this, it even caught all the intricacies of Castro's bongos and percussion toys, Lukather's subtle guitar solo, Williams' great singing and the individual backing vocals. Williams continued at the mic for the debut album's 'I'll Supply The Love' and he and Lukather traded vocals for the brooding 'Burn'. Paich took over the vocals and danced like Alfred Hitchcock during the surprising 'Stranger In Town', completed by some great, loud synth stabs from Porcaro.

The next surprise was 'Never Enough' – a great catchy tune that they don't play often – followed by the superb Lukather ballad 'I Won't Hold You Back'; a real master-class in quality song-writing. 'Holy War' was another high impact tune from the latest album where Lukather and Williams shared lead vocals, before the band went all the way back to their 1978 debut for the mega-hit 'Hold The Line' (a duet between Williams and Douglas-Foote) and its original B-side 'Takin' It Back' which was followed by the popular 'Pamela'. The epic 'Caught In The Balance' was pure brilliance and the rarely played Lukather song 'Without Your Love' segued into a solo using Jimi Hendrix's 'Little Wing', that preceded more new songs in 'Orphan' and the Prog-tastic 'Great Expectations'. The main set concluded with the familiar 'Rosanna', where a little misunderstanding on the big ending between Lukather and Forrest at least showed they're human.

Unusually the first of three encores was the medley that started their 35th Anniversary concerts, the obscure 'One The Run', which turned into the first album instrumental 'Child's Anthem' and then the finale of 'Goodbye Elenore'. The band left the stage to come back on again for the Rocking 'White Sister' but they still couldn't have left because they hadn't played 'Africa'; the version here stretched out by Castro's percussion and crowd participation.

So there you have it, twenty-three great songs, seven incredible musicians, six great singers and superb sound and lights. Toto in 2015 are in very good shape indeed and this will be a contender for "Gig Of The Year".

Phil Ashcroft

BOREALIS

Dark Melodic Metal act Borealis from Canada return with their third album 'Purgatory', discussed in detail by Alexandra Mrozowska and the band's drummer Sean Dowell.

Tell us about your new album 'Purgatory'.

After a long hiatus, we knew we had to come out with something really strong for our patient fans and we feel we have succeeded in this. The feedback so far has been all positive. The album hasn't been released yet and there are still many reviews to come in for it, so we'll see what kind of feedback we get. We are excited to see what people think as it's a pretty different tone from our last album, 'Fall From Grace'.

Is there any concept behind the album?

'Purgatory' is a concept album following the tragic story of one family. It tackles the serious and controversial topic of suicide. The story begins with the death of a woman during childbirth. Her husband has a hard time coping with his loss and blames his newly born daughter for the death of his wife. He projects his pain and anger on to her and neglects to show her any kind of love for her entire life. She eventually reaches the point where she can't handle the torment any longer and wants to find her mother in the afterlife in hope that they can be together. This fantasy drives her to commit suicide after leaving a note for her father, featured in the song 'My Peace'. The daughter then finds herself in 'Purgatory', terrified and confused. When her father comes home to find the note and his daughter's body, he spirals into depression and regret for what he realises he's pushed his daughter to do. The story of the album was very dark and depressing so we felt we would end it on a more positive note with the track 'Revelation', where the daughter finally finds her mother in the afterlife. Songs jump between the perspectives of the father and the daughter. In the song 'From The Ashes' we see our guest vocalist Sarah Dee playing the role of the wife, speaking to the husband from the grave, trying to convince him that it is not their daughter's fault she is gone; but that she is the bridge between worlds for each of them and that he needs to see her as something to hold on to instead of push away. However, the husband is too stubborn and hurt to let himself forgive his daughter. This is the first time we have tackled a concept album and wanted tell a story that is fictional but does unfortunately occur in real life. Our artwork is an attempt to display all the tones of the album in one picture. A little girl all alone on a swing in a strange and twisted world with another world of fire in the distance. The back cover artwork then shows the swing empty to signify that she took the step into the afterlife.

What about the production, mix and mastering?

Well, when you get Thomas "Plec" Johansson of the The Panic Room Studios to master your album you know it's going to sound incredible. The idea behind the production of the album was to try and stand out a bit from the crowd. We wanted to sound different but familiar at the same time. We were very proud of 'Fall From Grace' and spent time wondering how we were going to top it in terms of music and production. We decided we didn't want to create 'Fall From Grace 2', and instead wanted to explore a more aggressive and epic sound for this album. We are anxious to see what people think of the new sound and hope those wanting to hear something more in the vein of 'Fall From Grace' aren't let down, but pleasantly surprised. The incorporation of the symphonic orchestral elements we feel really enhanced our sound. We still wanted the band to be the main focus of the album but to have it backed by an orchestra. I personally was very nervous about the production and mixing of the album as it was my first time producing and mixing an album after audio engineering school. I'm very proud of how it turned out and the feedback has been a major confidence boost going forward. We all have differing opinions of what the highlights are of the album. We all agree we're very proud of the ballad 'Rest My Child' and think it may actually give 'Watch The World Collapse' a run for its money! For me, the dynamics of Matt Marinelli's vocals from song to song is the highlight. I feel he really nailed it this time. The aggressive passages are aggressive and the soft parts are very musical.

You **mentioned the guest contribution by the Canadian Rock/Alternative singer Sarah Dee. How did that come about?**

I actually met Sarah when I was in audio engineering school. She was taking the vocal course and I did a project with her – and the rest of the guys from Borealis – to produce a song. I liked the power in her voice. For a tiny girl she has got some pipes! Toronto isn't home to many female Metal singers. The Metal scene here is almost entirely Death Metal, so finding a local who specialises in clean Metal vocals is very difficult. I like the dynamic between her voice and Matt's and their the ability to push their voices very hard or soften up. I think it fitted the song well.

What are your main influences?

Evergrey is a clear influence to us but it expands beyond the Metal genre as well. The company Two Steps From Hell was the biggest influence on the orchestral part of the album. On top of that, each member brings their own influence to their part in an attempt to create something that sounds like our own, so you can hear a lot of different elements working together. You may hear elements from bands such as Nightwish, In Flames, Avantasia, Scar Symmetry and many others….

What do you think about the current Canadian music scene?

The current Canadian music scene is primarily Death Metal and Folk Metal. I think there are a lot of talented bands that can't seem to break out of the Toronto scene and get worldwide recognition, but there is always a chance for any band to break into one scene or area. One thing many of them fail to realise is you can't rely on just playing the same venue over and over again in front of the same crowd. Absolutely you need to have great music that people love, but networking is every bit as important to your career. You need to establish connections outside of your hometown.

What are your current plans?

Our single 'My Peace' was just released on iTunes, so hopefully people can check that out. Currently we are preparing to hit the road with Evergrey and anxiously awaiting the new album's release. We are also lightly working on new material, so maybe we'll see the next album earlier than 2019! (laughs) We promise the next album will definitely not take as long!

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